

**POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA AND PAKISTAN:
EMERGING RELATIONSHIP (1990-94)**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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1995**



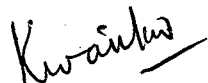
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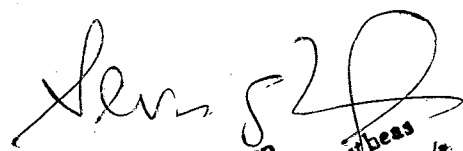
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Philosophy (M.Phil) of the University, is his original work
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would not have been able to complete the dissertation at all if it were not for the able guidance, thoughtful counsel, incisive criticism and constant spurring on by my Supervisor, Dr. K. Warikoo. He provided me all the support whatever I needed at any time, I can never forget his scholarly guidance and cooperation. I take this opportunity to acknowledge my immense gratitude and heartfelt thanks to him.

I am grateful to Pof. Dawa Norbu who in the initial stages provided me valuable suggestions. I am extremely thankful to all my teachers whose enlightening lectures enabled me to tackle the subject of my research work.

The undiminished love, affection and encouragement of my caring parents, Bhaiya, Bhabhi and Sisters have proved to be a constant source of sustenance and inspiration in my life's various endeavours. This work was no exception.

I sincerely thank all my friends and well-wishers who always helped and cooperated with me in several ways. I wish them success in their life and Best of everything. And finally thanks to Premjee and sunny who rendered invaluable assistance by cheerfully typing the dissertation under tremendous pressure.

Sanjeet

DEDICATED TO
MY
PARENTS

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PREFACE

Central Asia has been of fundamental importance in the history and politics of Eurasia. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of the newly independent and sovereign Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan- all having a predominantly Muslim population - has drastically changed the balance of power in this region. A new great game with Pan-Islam as its vital ingredient has started. Whereas the Central Asian states have earnestly begun to rediscover their roots on quite a new basis, Pakistan has stepped in to fill the vacuum by playing the Islamic card.

Central Asia has become a key and crucial element in the formation of post cold war foreign policy of Pakistan. These states have emerged at a time, when the US had begun to abandon Pakistan as a strategic partner and ended military aid to it, particularly after the accomplishment of US objectives in Afghanistan. It also came at a time when Pakistan continued to be fully involved in supporting the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. The development also occurred when Pakistan was singled out by international community for its involvement in a clandestine nuclear weapon programme, drug trafficking and

fomenting international terrorism.

The emergence of Central Asian states has raised hopes in Pakistan for securing diplomatic leverage, economic, political and strategic depth vis-a-vis India. The hopes are due to the fact that nearly 45 million Muslims living in the region provide religious and cultural basis for developing this relationship. Pakistan perceives that establishing close relationship with Central Asia for economic and strategic purposes would enhance its economy and give it more leverage in regional power structure.

Establishing close relationship with Central Asia for economic and strategic purposes was a dream of Pakistan's former President Zia-ul-Haq. In collaboration with Iran, Pakistan has tried to institutionalize various economic and regional blocks. In this direction they have persuaded Central Asian Republics to join Economic cooperation organisation (ECO). In Asian-cum-Islamic accentuation of the expanded ECO has been widely considered by Pakistan as a means to regain both its political clout and strategic importance that dated after the end of the Afghan war and the termination of the US economic and military aid to Pakistan. Pakistan perceives that Islamic orientation of ECO will make it stronger and cohesive and can provide a broadbased forum for India

bashing. Pakistan is eager to develop the overland trade route through Afghanistan to link it with Central Asia. Islamabad is considering several proposals for creating new trade routes for commerce and has also offered access to Pak ports.

Notwithstanding their intra-ethnic diversities, the Muslims of Central Asia have been sharing common religious beliefs and cultural traditions with their counterparts in Pakistan. Evidence suggests that there is religious and cultural revivalism in Central Asia. Islamic literature is being smuggled into Central Asian states from Pakistan. Jamat-i-Islami of Pakistan and other Islamic organisation have been contributing to the widespread construction of Mosques and Madrassahs in Central Asia and supply of Islamic literature. In fact the army-bureaucracy-ISI combine in Pakistan has been persuing late General Zia's strategy to export Jihad across the Oxus into Central Asia.

In 1990's Pakistan has sought to play the Islamic religious card in its dealing with neighbouring Central Asia states emphasising their historico-religious and cultural affinities. Pakistan assumed that these states would turn into the Islamic states. But in reality, activities of the religious and right wing groups includ

ing Jamat-i-Islami have alarmed Central Asian states. Perturbed by the developments in Tajikistan and continued strife in Afghanistan, the Central Asian states have opted for a secular model.

Pakistan's strategic interest in the area largely comes from its anti-India policy. Pakistan tried to project India as alien power which is doing atrocities on Muslims in various areas. The motive of Pakistan has been to get access to the resources of Central Asian Republics by debasing India. Since Pakistan's main problem seems to be its complex identity crisis vis-a-vis India, Pakistan perceives that Islamisation of Central Asian Republics would strengthen and rationalise Pakistan's own existence.

On their part, the Central Asian States too have been looking for new allies in the region which could help them in their process of nation building and economic development. However, Afghanistan has proved to be the main stumbling bloc between Central Asian Republics and Pakistan. The Central Asian states have viewed with suspicion the role of Pakistan and Afghan Mujahideen in promoting Islamic militancy in Tajikistan. The Transborder movement of Afghan and Tajikistan and arms has contributed to a great measure to the ongoing crisis

in Tajikistan. Continued turmoil in Afghanistan and Tajikistan is seen as a potential threat to regional peace in Central Asia.

It is in this context that this study has been conducted to analyse the entire gamut of relations (Political, strategic, economic and cultural) between the newly independent Central Asian states and Pakistan during the period 1990 to 1994.

The first Introductory chapter discusses the linkages between Central Asia and Pakistan in a historical perspective. It also examines determinants of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Central Asia. The Second chapter provides an insight into the political and strategic linkages between the two regions. It discusses in detail the evaluation of bilateral relations, implications of the situation of Afghanistan, India's position vis-a-vis Pakistan, US perception of Pakistan and Central Asia and other related issues. Development of economic cooperation between Central Asian Republics and Pakistan has been dealt in detail in this chapter. It also explores the role of ECO and its future prospects. Cultural ties have been dealt with in the fourth chapter, which also gives insight into Islamic factor in Pakistan's policy towards Central Asia. The study is rounded up by providing conclusions in its fifth chapter.

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

History confirms the long traditional interaction between the Indian sub-continent and Central Asia. Direct contacts over many centuries between the two civilizations have left a mutual imprint on every aspect of their lives. From pre-historic to the modern times, political stability and uncertainties in Central Asia and the Indian sub continent influenced each other's geo-political, geo-cultural and geo-economic destinities.

Even before the beginning of the Christian era, around 2nd or 3rd century B.C., the Scythic nomadic tribals settled in the Oasis land of Central Asia extended even right up to modern Sindh.¹ These pointed-capped nomadic horsemen pushed down into what is now known as Seistan after their name, and moved even right upto modern Sindh, which was then called Scythia after them, their traces are preserved in the rock carvings of Gilgit region along the Indus river. Their close cousins were Kushans. They founded the largest empire of the ancient world, stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Bay

1. A.H.Dani, New light on Central Asia, Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1993, p.16

of Bengal and from the Aral Sea to the Arabian sea with their summer capital at Kapisa (Bagram near modern Charikar in Afghanistan) and winter capital at the city of Peshawar, which was then known as Purushapura.²

It is these Kushans who for the first time laid a solid foundation for close cultural links between Central Asia and present-day Pakistan. Their official dress, Shalwar, Kamiz and Sherwani, has now become the national dress of Pakistan.³ The Kushans patronized not only Buddhism but also world famous Gandhara art. They founded a number of Buddhist monastries and stupas which still survive in the nook and corner of the different hills and ranges in Pakistan. It was in this age that the Silk route took its concrete shape that joined east and west by land routes.

In the 5th century A.D., the Kushans were followed by a confederacy of the Huns, known as Epthalites. One of their branches built a strong kingdom in the Indus region and introduced a new system of land tenure in the country. It is alongwith the Huns that many other tribes, such as the Jats and Guffars, entered Pakistan.

2. *ibid*, p.17

3. *ibid*, p.35

The Hunish system of tribal ownership was later followed by the Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴

Next came the migration of Turkish tribes in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. In the Northern areas of Pakistan the Tarakhan dynasty of Gilgit came from across the Pamirs and established the Turkish rule in Gilgit, Hunza and Nagir and at about the same time came here the Turkish ruling families of Khapalu and Shigar. In the wake of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni came the Gakkhars whose population spread out from the Indus to the Jhelum. It is, however, the Muslim Turks, who coming from Bokhara, defeated their own cousins, the pre-Muslim Turks and introduced here a new Turko-Islamic cultural pattern from Central Asia. A new urban setting of Muslim towns was thus started and new routes opened for trade and commerce with Central Asia, which is described by Alberuni in his account. This was the time when the Ghaznavid empire incorporated the whole of present day Pakistan with parts of Central Asia, right upto Merv. The mosque architecture of the Central Asian type, the victory towers, such as those now standing at Ghazni, and the tomb style based on the mausoleum of Ismail, the Samanid ruler of Bokhara, came into vogue. The Turkish Shahi cities of Peshawar,

4. *ibid*, p.36

Ohind (modern Hund) and Nandna in Jhelam district were turned into Islamic centres and the new cities of Lahore, Pak Pattan and Multan became the focal points of Islamic culture. Through this new Turkish population Central Asia exported new variety of its culture that was now suffused with Islamic elements. The Ghaznavid period switched on a new direction of Islamic trends that binds the people of Pakistan with those of Central Asia.

This Turkish trend was further spurred by the conquests of the Ghorid Sultans who blended together the Tajik and Turkish elements and paved the way for Turko-Persian culture in Afghanistan and Pakistan. When Central Asia was overpowered by the Mongols in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D., there was great influx of Turko-Tajik population in the wake of Jalaluddin Khwarizm Shah, Many of them continued to come even later and settled down in Punjab. The Mongols continued to push in year after year and they settled down in Punjab as new-Muslims. These Mongols introduced here the titles of Khan and Kagan (or Khagan) and their new system of horse training, horse striping and also their military system .⁵

5. ibid, p.38

In the 14th century A.D., the conquests of Amir Timur, who after overturning the little Khanates that had parcelled out the territory of Changiz Khan in Central Asia, made a bid for a new world order in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and right up to the Mediterranean coast in the west and to this was added the whole of the territory presently comprising Pakistan and the Delhi Sultanate.

In the first half of sixteenth century Babur, who hailed from Ferghana valley founded the Mughal dynasty in India. Mughal empire incorporated Afghanistan and the Indian sub-continent. During this period, under the Mughal empire, the invaders, while adhering to their ideals and religion, adapted themselves to indigenous Indian culture. The end result of the Mughal period was the growth of an Indo-Islamic culture, conditioned by the spatial environment of the Indian subcontinent.⁶With the Mughals came the Persian speaking Tajiks and also the Uzbeks. These new ethnic elements spread over the whole of northern and north-western India. According to Akbar's historian Abul Fazl, poets from Bukhara and Merv stayed at the imperial court and a number of high-ranking

6. D.Banarjee, 'Central Asia : current situation and future prospects', Strategic Digest, August 1993, p.1231.

Mughal mansabdars were of Central Asian origin.⁷ Sugar, cotton and indigo figured prominently among the commodities exported to Central Asia from the Indian subcontinent which imported Central Asian horses, dried fruits and precious stones. Trade relations with Central Asia were never disrupted during the medieval period even though the relations between the ruling dynasties were at times far from cordial.⁸

In the later period of the Mughal rule Central Asia acquired a new importance in the context of the growing desire of the Russian Tsars to establish trade and diplomatic contacts with the Delhi Sultnate. In all, the Russian Tsars sent five missions to the Mughal court in India, but only Semyon Malenky in A.D.1701 could succeed in getting an audience from Emperor Aurangzeb. On the Indian side, Babur who knew about the decline of the power of the Golden horde and the rise of the Moscow state, had sent Khoja Hussain to Moscow, who reached there in A.D.1532, two years after his death.⁹

7. Deuendra Kaushik, *India and Central Asia, Satvahan*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 18

8. *ibid*, p.18.

9. *ibid*, p.18-19.

Emergence of Central Asia

Central Asia became the focus of competition between two European powers, Great Britain and Russia, which came to be known as the 'Great game'. The defeat of Napoleon in the early 19th century saw the conflict in Europe being replaced by colonial expansions around the globe. Central Asia then became an attractive target and an object of intense rivalry between Russia and Britain. This was to last almost a hundred years. While Britain was more concerned with sea routes around the world to sustain its commerce, Russia was directed by geography to seek a wider expansion of its central position in the continent. Underpinning this desire was a need for port facilities in the warmer waters in the south which the British were determined to prevent. Thus British imperialism in India and Russian expansion into Central Asia and the subsequent Anglo Russian rivalry led to the cessation of direct contacts between Central Asia and Indian sub-continent.¹⁰

By the second half of the 19th century, Russia consolidated its position in the region. Yet, it was somewhat loose and amorphous grouping. There was no tradition of nationhood or nationalism in these states,

10. D.Banarjee, no. 6, p.1231.

all of them being essentially multinational.¹¹ At the time of 1917 revolution Central Asia consisted of three political divisions -Russian Turkistan, the Khanates of Khiva and of Bokhara. While the province of Turkistan was created for administrative convenience, the two native states preserved the local cultural traditions. Despite the Tsarist Russian colonisation, Central Asia kept its medieval Islamic cultural character all along and its people were still linked by a wider Muslim bond of relationship.¹²

It was only after the October revolution of 1917 that a process of forming the new republics began. By 1936 the five Soviet Socialist Republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan came into being and which were also called by their collective name of Central Asian Republics (CAR). The Bolshevik revolutionaries, for all their outward support for the self determination of the indigenous nations of the former Russian empire, did try for its cultural and political assimilation. Their ideal was to forge a common Soviet identity which would affirm its loyalty to revolutionary internationalism rather than local nation-

11. *ibid.*

12. A.H.Dani, no. 5, p.75

alism. Although the former Soviet republics were given a formal autonomous state, they were warned to be 'Socialist in content' and only 'nationalist in form'.¹³

Though the Tsarist and Soviet ambition of forging a supranational imperial identity was rejected when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, it left its mark on the development of Central Asian identity. After the disintegration of Soviet Union, the world has discovered Central Asia again. The five Central Asian states have never existed as modern nations before, or within their current borders. Whereas their national identities are being consolidated they are still in the "process of determining their true character, interests, allies and opponents".¹⁴ The new Central Asian states are keen to develop close socio-economic and political ties with their neighbours in South, East and West Asia. And Pakistan is in the forefront of forging new linkages with Central Asia.

13. Roland Dannreuther, *Creating New States in Central Asia*, Adelphi Paper no. 288, March 1994, p. 9.

14. Graham E. Fuller, *The Asian interior- An introduction*, *Orbis*, vol. 38, no. 4, Fall 1994, p. 545.

Determinants of Pak Foreign policy and direction of relationship:

Pakistan emerged as a sovereign independent nation in 1947 following the British withdrawal from India and its partition. Till 1991, Pakistan's relationship with erstwhile Soviet Union passed through various phases. Pakistan's foreign policy has had a significant role to play in the country's politics because of its myriad domestic problems of economic development and nation building. The importance of foreign policy in the domestic politics of Pakistan has manifested itself in two ways : one, the number of occasions that political changes in the country have taken place on issues directly connected with its foreign policy ; and secondly, the line of distinction between opposition to the regime and opposition to its foreign policy has come to be very thin in Pakistani politics.¹⁵

Before analysing the relationship between Central Asia and Pakistan it is necessary to understand the basic determinants of Pakistan Foreign policy which follows :

15. A.K. Ray in Pakistan's Foreign Policy Objectives : A Framework of Analysis, in Pakistan : Society and Politics, South Asian Studies series, 6, (ed) Pandav Nayak, South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1984, p.85

(i) The geographical position of Pakistan, with two great powers as its neighbours, China with a common border and the (Ex) USSR separated by the thin strip of the Afghan Wakhan border; three neighbours, India, Iran and Afghanistan of great regional significance.

(ii) The ideological quest of the Muslims of Pakistan to have "their own homeland whose creation and sustenance could provide the only guarantee for them to preserve their religious and cultural way of life with the opportunity of economic development within the framework of political and constitutional development which could not have been achieved as a minority community within a historically alien structure".¹⁶

(iii) In Pakistan's Foreign policy, all changes have been rationalized by conformity to Islamic values and an Indo-centric obsession.¹⁷

(iv) In the Pak Constitution of 1956, the principal provisions were : The state was to be called the Islamic

16. Sajjad Hyder, Foreign policy of Pakistan, Progressive Publishers, Lahore, 1987, p. 123-24.

17. A.K. Ray, no. 15, p. 89.

republic of Pakistan¹⁸ ; Pakistan was to be established as a democratic state based upon Islamic principles¹⁹ ; The head of State must be a Muslim²⁰ ; An Islamic Research Center was to be established to assist in the reconstruction of Muslim society as a truly Islamic basis²¹ ; and finally, the 'repugnancy clause' stipulated that no law contrary to the Quran and Sunna of the Prophet could be enacted.²²

The new constitution of 1962 too adopted the Islamic provisions of the 1956 constitution. These provisions are there to ensure that Pakistan's policies are strictly guided by Islamic laws. The Soviet Union was not convinced of the *raison d'etre* for the creation of Pakistan. The Soviet interpretation of the political developments in British India continued to differ from the Muslim League version²³. Two prominent Soviet specialists on -----

18. Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; Lahore; Government of Pakistan, March 1956.

19. *ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *ibid.*

22. *ibid.*

23. Mahboob A. Popatia, *Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union 1947-1979*, Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi, 1988, p.15.

Pakistan opined, that the movement for Pakistan was led by "the Muslim landlords, bent upon seizing the commanding political heights in areas with a Muslim majority, and the big Muslim bourgeoisie, which was out to win a market of its own and to get rid of more powerful competitors."²⁴

Development of Pakistan's relations with Central Asia during the Soviet period was inhibited due to various factors; (a) Pakistan's pro-west tilt in the early cold war days, (b) Pakistan's participation in the US sponsored defence alliances such as SEATO and CENTO alienated EX-USSR from Pakistan, (c) Pakistan's open hostility against India and Indo- Soviet friendly relations, (d) close relationship between Pakistan and China. Thus Pakistan's policy in political, ideological and strategic terms was not tuned to be friendly towards the former Soviet Central Asian Republics when they constituted part of the Soviet state system. Sajjad Hyder, a veteran Pakistan diplomat strengthens this perception in these words: "The experiences of the 1965 war and the 1971 dismemberment have forced the recognition of certain basic empirical realities in the conduct

24. Yury V. Gankovsky and L.R. Gorden Polonskaya, A History of Pakistan, 1947 - 1958, Peoples Publishing House, Lahore, P.6-7

of our foreign policy and security affairs. The one is that the USSR has the greatest ability to harm Pakistan as it demonstrated in 1971".²⁵

The loss of East Pakistan necessitated a course correction in Pakistan's foreign policy. For strategic as well as sentimental reasons, Pakistan focused its attention on the Islamic states of the Middle East²⁶. It upgraded its policy towards the Muslim nations and tried to establish friendly relations with all Muslim nations irrespective of variations in political systems, international alliances or ideology. Pakistan would aid Muslim minorities residing in non-Muslim states and would request the Islamic nations to join in the effort²⁷. Thus Pakistan's foreign policy was guided by Pan-Islamism.

General Zia-ul-Haque, took the lead in organising resistance against the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan. In January 1980, he presided over an extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. The

25. Sajjad Hyder, no.16, p.127.

26. S.M. Burke and Lawrence Ziring, Pakistan's Foreign Policy, Oxford University Press, p.422.

27. Pakistan's relations with the Islamic states: A Review, Islamabad: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 21 February 1977, p.20-1.

Pakistani leader condemned the Soviet action and called upon the conference representatives to join together in defence of the Islamic millat (nation). Zia noted that this was the first instance since world war II that a superpower had made a sovereign, independent Muslim country the target of its attack.²⁸ Pakistan bolstered the Afghan resistance at every opportunity and directed, aided and armed the Afghan Mujahideen in their armed struggle against the Soviets. The Soviets were also at odds with Islamabad on the Pakistan's 'Islamic bomb' programme.

In 1990s, significant developments have taken place that are going to shape the future relationship between Pakistan and Central Asia. These are:

(i) End of bipolarity in world affairs marked by the elimination of bloc-oriented policy premises and processes of diplomacy, economy, security, culture, ideology and political life;

(ii) The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and Eastern Europe;

(iii) Massive retardation of the nuclear arms race and radical reduction in tactical and strategic weapon systems

28. Burke and Ziring, no. 26, p. 448.

tems;

(iv) World-wide spread of detente, resulting in the emergence of new patterns of cooperation between states accross the continents;

(v) Increasing role of the UN system in major world concerns;

(vi) Globalisation of economy involving world division of labour and opening of national and regional markets to expanded world trade, transfer of investments and technology;

(vii) Growing menace of Islamic Fundamentalism and Pan-Islamic movement; and

(viii) Disintegration of Soviet Union and emergence of Central Asia as the latest region of Sovereign states on the global map, with prospects of distinct shift in power-politics.

In the present situation, Central Asia faces four major challenges-

(i) To delink themselves from the restiges of former Soviet links, and build a new policy attuned to democracy and liberal values,

(ii) Revamp their shattered economy marked as it is by shortages, inflation and unbalanced and lop-sided pattern of development,

(iii) Evolve mutually beneficial programmes of regional

cooperation within the Central Asian states and with neighbouring countries and others, and

(iv) Resist the probable rise of Islamic fundamentalism and stabilise the foundation of secular and just civil society.

The relationship between Central Asia and Pakistan is going to be definitely influenced by the global and regional changes and domestic socio-economic and political condition in both the regions. Will Pakistan try to forge close relationship with the Central Asian republics on the basis of economic reasons or Islamic and cultural linkages will prove to be more important? What will be the shape of foreign policy of both regions? How far Indian factor will be important in the relationship between Central Asia and Pakistan and how it would influence India in turn? How far the Afghanistan imbroglio will prove to be a stumbling block for forging closer relationship between both regions? These issues are examined indepth in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC LINKAGES

Ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union Pakistan viewed Central Asia primarily as a territorial enticement to realize its quest for strategic depth vis-a-vis South Asia. This territory is sought to be controlled through a combination of political- military alliances, economic and cultural pacts.

Establishing close relationship with Central Asia for political, strategic and economic purposes was the dream of Pakistan's former President Zia-ul-Haq. Zia's intelligence Chief Lt. Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rehman, once told the visiting US dignitaries : "the holy war against Communists would not remain confined to Afghanistan alone but would be pursued into Central Asia".¹ This clandestine interest in Central Asia affairs became apparent as early as in August 1991, when the disintegration of the former Soviet Union started. A senior KGB official, Anatoli Balanov, was quoted by BBC having said that he had found evidence that Pakistan was involved in destabilising the Republic of Tajikistan. He added that the increasing influence of the fundamentalists there was

1. NATION, 2 August 1991

related to activities of Pakistani secret agencies.²

Within weeks of the disintegration of that the Soviet Union and well before the independence and recognition of Central Asian States as sovereign states, Pakistan sent a delegation of officials, businessmen, educationist, media-men led by the Minister of Economic Affairs, Sardar Assif Ahmad Ali to all the Central Asia states from November 24 to December 15, 1991.³ During this visit, Pakistan offered a revolving credit of \$30 million to Uzbekistan to import Pakistani Engineering goods.⁴ Sardar Asif Ali also offered Pakistan's cooperation in setting up direct telephone links and in starting long term economic cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan. He announced that PIA would soon start a direct service between Islamabad and Tashkent. On that occasion President Karimov of Uzbekistan insisted that Pak-Uzbek relations must be based strictly on bilateral ties with no interference from any other source.⁵

2. Susumu Awanohara and Salamat Ali, "Fear of Islam,"
Far Eastern Economic Review, 30 January, 1992
p.22

3. POT, p. 5816, Nov. 23, 1991

4. POT, P. 5990, Dec. 2, 1991

5. POT, p.5991, Dec. 2, 1991

After this hurricane trip through Central Asia, Asif Ali became euphoric over the success of the mission Central Asian states, claimed that Islamabad had made a breakthrough that was "equivalent to what Pakistan had with the U.S.A. in the fifties and in the eighties and with China in the sixties". The media in Pakistan also showed great enthusiasm for the Asif Ali mission and stressed on Islamabad making rapid progress in non-military matters, such as trade, economic relations and culture. The objective was to entice these States through offers of bilateral cooperation into a grouping that would isolate India. The starting point of this mission was to give Pakistan's cultural routes a new geographical direction and affinity and also project a perception that Afghanistan - Pakistan is a cultural extension of Central Asia. In the four decades since partition, Islamabad's rulers had repeatedly stressed that they were an extension of West Asia through age-old ties of history, faith and culture. The South Asian connection has always been played down in order to lure the Arab States into a strategic entente vis-a-vis India.

The same tactics was now being repeated in Central Asia, as Islamabad sought to give their thrust into the region a decidedly Islamic colouring. In a bid to con-

tain them within their orbit, Islamabad, alongwith Iran and Turkey, sponsored the membership of Central Asian States into the Economic Cooperation Organization) (ECO), another multilateral body, manifestly anti-Indian in orientation, through trade and economic bods that are underwritten by the common Islamic religion. Former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif had stated that such moves would "revive our past religious and cultural relationships. Moreover, it will further strengthen the Islasmic Ummah". If, at the regional level, Islamabad sought to wean them into an economic grouping that included India, on a large canvas, it sponsored these newly independent countries for membership of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), which was established in 1971. The new Central Asian states have joined the OIC. Though Zafar Imam opines that "the new Central Asian, States have joined the OIC not to promote Islamic solidarity but to serve their pressing developmental needs through multinational cooperation."⁶ But it has been noticed that Pakistan has utilised OIC for anti-India bashing and uses this form to muster support of Central Asian states on Kashmir issue against India.

6. Zafar Imam "India must reassess its ties with OIC", Times of India, September 12 1994.

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Preceded by formal statements from Islamabad of supporting the Central Asian states for membership of the OIC and ECO, Asif Ali paid a third visit to Centra Asia in early 1992, this time he quickly negotiated with these States, agreements and memoranda of understanding that were symbolic in nature, as the quantum of trade and the scope of economic cooperation was much smaller than India's existing levels with these Republics.

There has been concern in Pakistan over the growing Indo-U.S cooperation, after the end of cold war. Maleeha Lodhi (now Pakistani Ambassador in U.S.A) "a whole host of relationships in the region have been transformed, dimnishing Pakistan's traditional position. The most important is the bourgeoning Indo-US nexus the end of cold war polarisation in the region has lowered Islama-bad's value in Beijing's eyes."⁷ In that situation, it is argued that some kind of grouping of Islamic states can provide Pakistan a substantial counter-weight. The idea of strategic consensus among Pakistan, Iran and Turkey can be included in such notion - a concept unable to answer the most fundamental question: how much consensus can be forged without the perception of a common enemy, purpose or interest shared by countries with such

7.Pot, p.5119, Oct. 19, 1991

separate political and socio-religious systems. Advocates of this idea also failed to ask whether the countries proposed in this security grouping felt the same way as Pakistan about the need and value of such union.

President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev paid a state visit to Pakistan in February 1992, during which a declaration of principles governing relations between Pakistan and Kazakhstan was signed in Islamabad on Feb. 24, 1992 by the visiting Kazakhstan President, and the Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Both reaffirmed their faith in the universally accepted principles of inter-state conduct and their commitment to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter.⁸ The declaration affirmed that both the countries "shall develop and consolidate cordial relations, sincere friendship, good neighbourliness and comprehensive mutually beneficial cooperation in all fields on the basis of respect for the independence, Sovereign equality and territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's internal affairs". Both the countries pledged to promote "comprehensive cooperation specially in the economic, trade, scientific and technological, communications (including air, road, railway links of both sides and Seaports in

8. Muslim, 25/2/92

Pakistan) fields on the basis of the principle of equality, mutual benefit and most favoured nation treatment."

Both Kazakhstan and Pakistan agreed to develop ties and contacts in the fields of information, education, press, Radio, television, cinema, tourism and sports. Both the countries also agreed to coordinate their efforts to combat international terrorism, organised crime and illicit drug trafficking. The joint declaration stated that both the countries would cooperate with each other and together with other states to preserve and strengthen peace in the region and throughout the world. They also agreed to cooperate in international organizations. Besides, they decided to maintain regular contacts at various political, diplomatic and official levels, including meetings between the leaders of the two countries, to ensure constant development and strengthening of bilateral relations.⁹ Nazarbayev during his visit to Pakistan said that "As far as our policy in the Asian region is concerned, we are for priority to Islamic Cooperation, peace and stability and our final goal is solution of the national conflicts in all the hotbeds of the Asian continent."¹⁰ A Pakistani newspaper in its

9. POT, p.999, 1992.

10. POT, p.1030, 1992

editorial even commented that the Kazakhstan President was cold-shouldered in India because during the ECO summit held in Tehran, he had supported the demand for plebiscite in Kashmir.

However, Kazakhstan's President, Nazarbayev who had earlier visited India made a categorical announcement at delhi, that his country would not join any fundamentalist Islamic bloc. He declared that Kazakhstan would like to remain a secular country like India.¹¹ Kazakhstan has also been striving to develop contacts with as many countries thereby seeking isolation through religious consolidation with any bloc.

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif signed similar joint declaration and Tajikistan's President, Rehman Nabiyeu aimed at promoting and consolidating the friendly relationship between the two countries.¹² Uzbek President, Islam Karimov too visited Islamabad in August 1992 and declared that Uzbekistan would be opening its embassy in Islamabad shortly.¹³ Tajikistan's President visited Pakistan in March-April of 1994. On that occa-

11. POT, p.1002,1992.

12. POT,p.3485, 1992.

13. POT, p. 4145, 1992.

sion three agreements promoting trade and furthering cooperation in several other sectors were signed. Pakistan's Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto offered to host the proposed Tajik peace talks to end the conflict in that country.

The Interior Minister of Pakistan, Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Nasirullah Khan Babar visited Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and China in September- October 1994. He stated that the Muslim republics of Central Asia have urged Pakistan to provide them transit trade facilities on its territory. He disclosed that for the time being "Pakistan has agreed that the Karakoram highway should be used for the exchange of trade convoys between China and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan."¹⁴

In October 1994, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited Turkmenistan. The main agenda was the vexed question of peace in Afghanistan and the need to create the necessary infrastructure to develop trade between the two states. Both the issues are closely interlinked as the latter one could not be managed without resolving the first one. In late November 1994, a Kazakh delegation

14.SWB, FE/2122, 10 Oct 94

visited Pakistan. Both sides agreed to finalize a deal relating to a cement plant.¹⁵

In this manner Pakistan has put its diplomatic relations with all the Central Asian countries on a firm footing. Besides efforts are on to turn these contacts more active and meaningful, by securing a direct access to Central Asia. But the ongoing turbulence in Afghanistan poses the main problem on this account. As such Pakistan has been playing active diplomacy on both the Afghanistan and Tajikistan questions.

AFGHANISTAN FACTOR

Right from 1979, the year of Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan has aided, abetted and organised the Afghan Mujahideen groups and prominent among them being Gulbadin G. Hekmatyar's Hizbul Islami, to rid Afghanistan of the Soviet / Soviet backed governments. In doing so Pakistan had certain objectives: like Pakistan always anticipated the possibility of a joint attack from Afghan and Soviet troops on the one front and the Indian military on the other. i) to remove the Soviets from Afghanistan. ii) to instal a pro-pak

15.SWB, FE/2166, 30 Nov.' 94

government in Afghanistan, which would facilitate the attaining of Pak foreign policy objectives across the oxus in Central Asia, iii) To create appropriate atmosphere for early return of millions of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, as increasingly these refugees were breaching local law and order and causing economic dislocation. iv) Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq, used the Afghanistan situation to bolster his martial law regime. v) Pakistan was projected as a frontline state defending of Islam against the Soviet Communist hegemony. vi) Pakistan wanted to create a strong block against India. vii) By using the Afghanistan factor, Pakistan succeeded in getting military and economic aid from U.S.A. This objective was achieved because there was convergence of interests between Washington and Islamabad on the need to defeat Soviets in Afghanistan, And U.S.A provided enough assistance in arms and money to which facilitated the modernization of Pakistan's armed forces.¹⁶

Pakistan was selected as the conduit for the covert arms supplies to the Afghan Mujahideen through the Central Intgelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA. The CIA was -----

16. Stephen P. Cohen, "South Asia after Afghanistan." problems of Communism (Washington, D.C.), January - February, 1985, pp. 18-31.

to refrain from any direct interference in arms distribution or the Mujahideen domestic policy. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan was entrusted with the task of identifying aid beneficiaries and manipulating the Mujahideen groups. In linking with the Mujahideen rival power play and the choice of the beneficiaries of the largesse, the options were purely those of Pakistan: these issues did not matter to the US and the allies as long as the Soviets were evicted¹⁷. For the Pakistani military, and especially for General Zia, the Soviet invasion was a good opportunity first to resolve the Afghanistan issue and then to try to establish a Muslim belt south of the Soviet Union under Pakistani influence.¹⁸

Although the termination in February 1989 of direct Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan removed the major threat to Pakistan, the unfinished war continued to occupy a central place on Islamabad's diplomatic agenda. New streams of Afghan refugees trickled into Pakistan as the internal Afghan conflict intensified after the Soviet

17. Prashant Dikshit, Afghanistan policy, strategic analysis, Nov. 93, p.1072.

18. Oliver Roy "The lessons of the Soviet/Afghan war" Adelphi Paper No.259, Published by Brassey's for the international Institute of Strategic Studies, London, summer 1991.

withdrawal. This brought to the total of refugees in Pakistan to almost 3-5 million.¹⁹ Beyond the economic cost of feeding the refugees and the ecological disaster caused by their encampment in certain areas, their continued presence in Pakistan is a potential threat to social tranquility and political stability in the country. Most of the refugees are politically connected with various competing Afghan resistance parties and have ready access to arms. Pakistan itself is a polarized society, and given the current state of confrontations, both political and sectarian, wider social conflagration cannot be ruled out.²⁰

Having achieved the objectives of eviction of Soviets from Afghanistan and also the installation of Mujahideen government, international commitment for Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan has ended. With the emergence of independent Central Asian states, new prospects of productive political and economic relations across Afghanistan with Central Asia, have been impelling Pakistan towards more active promotion of a political settlement in Afghanistan. Islamabad sees enormous

19. Rasul B. Rais, 'Afghanistan and regional Security after the cold war', problems of communism, May- June 1992, p.86.

20. ibid, p.86-87.

opportunities for entering the markets of these states. But without the bridge of Afghanistan, Pakistan's ability to further its interests in this region will be diminished. Moreover, the present political leadership of the Central Asian states is opposed to the militant and violence prone Islamist Afghanistan. They are genuinely concerned about its spill over effects in the adjoining Central Asian states. They fear that were fundamentalists of the Pushtun ethnic group to capture power in Kabul, the Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen minorities of Afghanistan might feel insecure and start migrating to Central Asia. Pakistan has been told in unequivocal terms that its support to the establishment of an extreme right-wing government in Afghanistan would impede friendly relations with Central Asia.²¹

Pakistani authorities have long been uncertain about the kind of state they prefer to see emerge in Afghanistan. Over the years the policies of Pakistan's military intelligence, the Inter-Services intelligence, whose operatives orchestrated much of the politics of resistance groups based inside Pakistan, seemed designed to keep Mujahideen leaders and parties divided, even while military and political assistance went disproportionately

21.MUSLIM, Jan 17,1992.

to the Islamist parties, which were expected to be more indebted to Pakistan for its wartime support.²²

The Hizb-i-Islami, headed by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, a Pushtun, evolved as the ISI's most favoured party. The other two important ethnic groups are Tajiks under the leadership of Ahmed Shah Massod and Burhanuddin Rabbani and Uzbeks fighting under Rashid Dostam. The Tajiks and Uzbeks are major ethnic groups in neighbouring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Still fierce fighting is going on between various militant groups and till the day peace has eluded Afghanistan.

The supreme pray of the Afghan situation is the inability of any faction to prove its might in any decisive manner.²³ Most of the factions have carved up large chunks of the country into their fiefs and the national army is only notional in character, with each warlord having his own air force and standing army. Why peace in Afghanistan will continue to elude its hapless citizens is because no major actor or benefactor in the

22. Marvin G. Weinbaum, "War and Peace in Afghanistan; the Pakistani role", Middle East Journal, vol.45, No.1, Winter 1991, p.76-79.

23. Aabha Dixit, Afghan civil war : A many sided conflict, The Hindustan Times, 20/1/94.

crisis is willing to climb down from his extremist stance. To the contrary, with every passing day, their attitudes are hardening and making them more desperate to make their unilateral control over the country prevail. But no group has the overwhelming power required to quell their adversaries.

At the moment there is an uneasy alliance between Hekmatyar and Abdur Rashid Dostam, who are ranged against the forces of the Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Masood and with President Rabbani.²⁴ After several years of unsuccessful efforts at propelling Hekmatyar into power in Kabul, Pakistan's ISI appears to have widened its options in the protracted Afghan civil war by introducing a new element. In recent months, groups of Afghan Taliban studying in madrassas across Pakistan have been energised into playing an active role in the continuing conflict. The Taliban are under the tutelage of the Pakistani Jamiat Ulema Islam (JVI), a popular religious and Pakhtoon nationalist party led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman. The 2,500 strong Taliban force, which enjoys the ISI's active backing, has been able to unseat several powerful warlords in those regions owing allegiance both to Hekmatyar and President Burhanuddin Rabbani, and has

24. Times of India, 3/10/94

also been able to challenge the drug lords.

The emergence of the Taliban as a powerful factor capable of undermining the authority of Rabbani and Hekmatyar's forces in different parts of the country and creating an alternative Pakhtoon leadership also serves Pak interests. It gives the ISI additional leverage in increasing its own importance in Afghan affairs. However it has further complicated the situation. Pakistan knows it very well that Central Asians have always been suspicious and never appreciated what Pakistan had been doing in Afghanistan. Pakistan has realised that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan would provide an easy land route for Pakistan to make an economic penetration in Central Asia. Even the Central Asian states realise that solution of Afghan problem will be helpful in the maintenance of stability and order. The deepening of crisis in Afghanistan along ethnic/regional divisions is going to have far-reaching implications for the regional security and stability, particularly the adjoining Central Asian states. It is in this context that the ongoing situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan's involvement in it, is seen to be of crucial importance by the Central Asian States, which do not wish to have such anarchic situations as has been experienced by Tajikistan.

TAJIKISTAN CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:-

The rapid politicization of Islam and the emergence of a militant Islamic Fundamentalist movement in Tajikistan took place after the Soviet action in Afghanistan. This coupled with the success of Khomeini revolution in Iran brought a new awakening among the Muslims of Central Asia.²⁵ The Afghan Mujahideen established wide contacts with the Tajiks particularly after the Soviet troops, most of whom were from Central Asia, landed in Afghanistan. Afghan Mujahideen leaders acknowledge that the 1979 Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan helped re-establish links between the Tajiks and their Muslim brethren in Afghanistan, who have the same language, same culture, same religion and same ancestors in common. Afghan Mujahideen groups with active guidance and assistance of Pakistan's ISI played a key role in fomenting the Islamic militancy in Tajikistan with a view to establish a friendly islamic state there. By the time Soviet Union crumbled, an underground network of Islamic movements, arms dumps and trained Islamic militants had positioned themselves in Tajikistan for launching the offensive to oust the remnants of Communist system and -----

25. K. Warikoo in Soviet Central Asia in Ferment, ed. by K. Warikoo and Dawa Norbu, Ethnicity and Politics in Central Asia, South Asian Publishers pvt. ltd., New Delhi, p. 67.

establish an Islamic form of government. Soon after its independence in 1991, Tajikistan has been engulfed by political conflict and violent inter-group clashes between the pro-Communist and the Islamist forces and their supporters. Trans border infiltration of armed bands and smuggling of arms with the help of Pakistan's Jamat-i-Islami and ISI, has been the main destabilising factor. Besides, Afghan Mujahideen controlling the Afghan border have been actively involved in armed clashes with the Russian and Tajik border guards.²⁶

Tajikistan is victim of political strife mainly due to continuous antagonism between the Communist loyalists and other emerging political forces, the most important of which is the Islamic Renaissance Party and its supporters. Islamist radicals are now operating from within Northern Afghanistan. They have set up a 'Tajik government in exile' and a Radio station. They are being assisted by the Afghan Mujahideen groups and also by the Islamist radical groups/parties of Pakistan. As these Mujahids are ethnically and culturally related to the Tajiks, their influence is greatest in Tajikistan and is the main cause of instability in the republic. The

26. K. Warikoo; Afghanistan factor in Central and South Asian Politics, New Delhi, Trans Asia informatics, 1994, p. 5.

disturbed situation in Tajikistan has been a cause of worry to other Central Asian states resulting in comparative isolation of Tajikistan from them. The very fact that Tajiks are Persian speaking - a language that remained official media of expression right to the end of the Amirate of Bokhara in 1920 - makes them distinct from the Turkic speaking population, such as Uzbeks, Khirgizs, Kazakhs, Turkmens and Tatars. The Tajik-Persian language brings them nearer to Afghans and Iranians and even to Pakistanis who have inherited the tradition of old classical Persian from the Tajik people. From the linguistic cultural point of view there is a common historical tradition between Tajikistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Uzbekistan has been the foremost CIS state to take strong notice of the developments in Tajikistan and the continuing crisis situation on the Tajik-Afghan borders. The Uzbek President, Islam Karimov has been repeatedly warning against the "advance of Islamic Fundamentalists and extremist forces from Afghanistan and Tajikistan." Karimov's fears are based on the belief that events in Tajikistan would not only consolidate the rapidly growing Islamic consciousness in Uzbekistan but also lead to its

politicisation.²⁷ Presence of a sizeable number of ethnic Tajiks who constitute about a quarter of Uzbekistan's population is yet another factor for the Uzbek concern over disorder in Tajikistan.

The turbulence and strife in Tajikistan has spilled over into the neighbouring state of Kyrgyzstan as well, which is evidenced by the influx of thousands of armed Tajik Islamic radicals into the Osh oblast.

Thus the Afghan imbroglio has created regional disorder. There is remote possibility of any peace process taking off in this region, as internecine fighting is continuing. It may be impossible to avert periodic civil war in Afghanistan without a persisting international role, even a peace-keeping force. The probability is, of course, that U.N. resources required for such undertakings, currently so severely taxed globally will be unavailable even if the UN is disposed to act.

Regional Security Perspectives:

The developments in Central Asia and its neighbourhood have attracted serious attention of different coun-

27. *ibid*, p. 8

tries in this region, particularly Iran, China, India. However, the anarchic situation in Afghanistan and later in Tajikistan have raised important question marks on regional security, thereby attracting a strong reaction from Russia and other Central Asian States. A CIS collective peace-keeping force, though dominated by Russian troops has been manning the Tajik- Afghan border. Despite the end of cold war, USA too in Central and South Asian affairs, their interest being mainly to reduce the Russian or Chinese influence in the region. An authoritative exposition of US interests and objectives in Central Asia is contained in a report issued in June 1992 from Washington by the United States Institute of Peace under the title "Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Perspectives for political evolution and the role of Islam". This report written by Robert Oakley, formerly American Ambassador to Pakistan and currently Senior Coordinator, Special Middle East programme.²⁸

According to the report, US Scholars and policy makers anticipate three types of crises in Central Asia: economic, ethnic and Islam. Regarding Islam, the report says that "it could take a radical, revolutionary turn in the event of popular unrest and the inaction of unrespon-

28.POT,p. 6049, 1992

sive regimes."²⁹ The report has some interesting things to say about Pakistan's role in Central Asia. It says, "Pakistan has relatively limited financial resources, but it has people who know how to use them to develop private or public business (e.g; hotels, banks, Insurance Companies, textile factories). There is also a widespread, though exaggerated, perception of cultural and linguistic commonality between Pakistan and Central Asia. Obviously, Pakistan's extensive involvement in Afghanistan has created a bureaucratic and military cadre of people, with some of the relevant language skills and cultural sensitivity needed for relations with former Soviet Central Asia."³⁰ America visualises threats from the "combination of Iran, Islamic fundamentalism, instability and presence of a nuclear capability". The report also provides a peep into American thinking on who its potential allies in Central Asia could be when it refers to the interests and the role of India and Israel. In fact, there is little doubt of a triangular linkage of the U.S.A., India and Israel as non-Muslim secular military and political powers who could collectively combat what are seen as common threats³¹.

29. POT, p.6050, 1992.

30. POT, p.6051, 1992.

31. POT, p. 6052, 1992.

Regarding the role of India and Israel, the report says : "India also wishes to counter the efforts of Pakistan and other Muslim states to gain influence, as it fears these efforts could create a central - South Asian Islamic bloc, threaten India's position in Kashmir and possibly excite troubles with Muslim concentration in India. The possibility of military, especially nuclear, cooperation of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian States with Pakistan is specially worrisome." 32

As the report underlines, the U.S. view of Pakistan seems to have changed in the context of emergence of Islamic Central Asia. The Americans see Pakistan in the same light as Iran, as a country, whose role they are not too enthusiastic about and whom they attribute with rather grandiose plans. The report is apparently sceptical about the Tashkent-Karachi road project when it says that "one should not forget that Central Asia could seek an outlet to the sea via Far East as well as via South Asia. The Trans-Siberian railway is a reality, whereas the Tashkent-Karachi super highway is still only a

dream.³³

The differences between Pakistan and U.S. which had hitherto remained dormant because of the Afghanistan crisis, especially the controversy over Pakistan's nuclear programme, has have come onto for now. It has resulted in the stoppage of the U.S. military and economic aid to Pakistan in the wake of imposition of Pressler Amendment and strained relations between the two countries. The United States has also reportedly approached Tajikistan seeking assurances from their leaders not to supply enriched uranium to Pakistan or Iran.³⁴ More recently, the U.S.A. accused Pakistan of violating the missile technology control regime (MTCR) when it reportedly received M-11 missiles from China. The U.S. has also demanded the return of six U.S. frigate ships leased to the Pakistan navy in the eighties. It has been reported that the Bush administration in its last days was seriously considering to put Pakistan on the list of the terrorist states on account of its alleged support to the Kashmiri secessionists.³⁵

33. POT, p. 6053, 1992

34. Shameem Akhtar, "Relation with Central Asian States," Dawn, Karachi, August 14, 1992.

35. Mohammad Ali, Siddiqi, "whither U.S.- Pakistan ties?" Dawn, Karachi, January 19, 1993

India being a major power in the region and facing pak-supported terrorist and secessionist movement in Kashmir, has developed a deep interest in the Central Asian region. India's interests in Central Asia were and still remain predominantly economic though they have lately come to overlap security/strategic considerations. India is concerned about Pakistan and Iran's alleged nuclear collaboration with Kazakhstan - the first declared nuclear power of the Islamic world. India has found these developments very propitious for making common cause with the U.S.A., the Russian Federation and Israel - which share an increasing concern over the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region.

India sees Central Asia as an important market for its consumer products and also as a strategic partner to counter Pakistan in the region and in different world organisations. Russia has suggested of an Indian role in the ongoing intra-Tajik dialogue. A closer relationship with Central Asian states can help India in eliciting diplomatic support in OIC and other organisations.

Pakistan's strategic thinking is based on the belief that its national security turns primarily on the coun-

try's endemic confrontation with India. Policy makers in Pakistan firmly believe that the Indians will work hard to nurture close links with any Afghan government as a means of keeping Pakistan off balance. President Zia and others had earlier conceived of a fundamentalist Muslim regime in Kabul as the best way to safeguard against such an eventuality.³⁶

It is interesting to note that all the Heads of State of the Central Asian Republics paid their visits to New Delhi and shared their perceptions on various international and bilateral matters with the Indian leaders. Economic interactionw have been the foremost concern of India while re-establishing a new workable relationship with these states. Earlier India had a thriving trade with Central Asia covered under the Indo-Soviet trade agreement, and safeguard of these interactions in the field of trade and commerce has been given priority for laying the new foundation of bilateral relations with the Central Asian Republics.

India's concern in Central Asia stem from the larger changing political enviornment around its immediate

36. Marvin G. Weinbaum, *Pakistan and Afghanistan, Resistance and Reconstruction*, Westview Press, 1994, p. 159.

neighbourhood. Sudden emergence of new states with predominant Muslim population and fear of these States forming Islamic alliance constituted an important element. The U.S. Senator Lery Pressler, during his visit to India also cautioned India on the danger of Islamic fundamentalism sponsored by Pakistan in Central Asia. The point was valid in view of Pakistan's active involvement in fomenting Islamist radicalism and terrorism in Afghanistan and through it in Tajikistan and in India's Jammu and Kashmir state.

Pakistan obsession with India is obvious from its Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmad Ali's statement which he gave before leaving for Central Asia in Islamabad on January 6, 1994 that his main objective was "to put Pakistan at equidistance with India as far as Central Asia was concerned". He cautioned that "to befriend the Central Asian states or to make them partners and allies would take a long time".³⁷

Pakistan has been raising Kashmir issue invariably at all international forums including OIC and ECO summits though Pakista hosted the ECO Summit in 1994 at Islamabad, it found little support over the Kashmir issue from -----

37. Dawn, 7/1/1994 (POT, 76).

the other participants. While Afghanistan and Iran suggested political solutions to the issue, the Central Asian republics kept noticeably quiet.³⁸ Another major motivating factor for Pakistan courting the Central Asian republics seems to circumvent the US arms embargo and to obtain nuclear weapon technology at bargain price³⁹. India is apprehensive of the fact that nuclear capacity or technological knowhow can slip into the hands of Pakistan. Further, the CIA have estimated that as many as 2,000 former Soviet Scientists have intimate knowledge of weapons design and another 3,000 to 5,000 work on uranium enrichment or plutonium production. Many of these scientists belong to the Central Asian region and could become nuclear mercenaries through religious or ideological incentives. Pakistan is a country which has crossed the nuclear weapon threshold through theft of technology and materials. The Central Asian connection is required to procure enriched Uranium to make more basement bombs and nuclear parts and delivery systems that strengthen its nuclear deterrent.⁴⁰

38. Times of India, The ECO Summit, 20 January 1995.

39. Times of India, 22 June 1992

40. Aabha Dixit, Position of Pakistan and Afghanistan. World Focus, March - April, 1993, p. 42-43.

Pakistanis feel that they have enough experience in military cooperation in West Asian countries. Pakistan also relies on the assumption that Central Asia will seek military cooperation from Pakistan and reject Western military help. But in all likelihood the Central Asian Republic will continue to look towards Russia for military support for quite sometime to come. The prospect for Pakistan's future military role in Central Asia has been reduced due to signing of the "Treaty on collective security" by CIS member states in Tashkent on May 15, 1992, which ensures the stationing of CIS peace-keeping troops on Aghanistan's border with Tajikistan. In fact Russia has been scared of the possible influx of Islamic militants from Pakistan and Afghaniostan into the CIS. Russia has had the bitter experiences with Islamist militants in Chechenya.

China, which has common borders with three Central Asian republics - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, also maintains political and economic interests in Central Asia. Since there is a large population in Xinjiang with historical and cultural links with the population of these republics, China is concerned lest political ferment and instability should spill into Xinjiang. China also sees bright prospects for trade, which is already underway using the rail and road links between

China and these republics. Though China's coastline is at a considerable distance from Central Asia, there is active interest in the possibility of China providing transit facilities to Central Asia, for which another feasible route could be the Karakoram highway that links China and Pakistan.

Pakistan is understood to have offered " China the extension of the existing Karakoram Highway to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and hence to the other Central Asian states, in order to secure direct access to the region".⁴¹ But the continuing internecine strife in Afghanistan and the bloody civil war in Tajikistan have rendered the Pakistani ambition of securing the 'strategic depth' in Central Asia, as impracticable, at least for the time being. The Central Asian states have begun to be cautious about Pakistani postures," keeping in view its record of actively propping up the Afghan Mujahideen groups and their complicity in spreading gun culture and Islamic fundamentalism in Tajikistan".⁴² The Uzbek President, Islam Karimov and other Central Asian leaders have called upon Russia to help in repelling the "power-

41. K.Warikoo,ed., CENTRAL ASIA: Emerging New Order, Har Anand Publication, 1995, pp28

42. *ibid*, pp28.

ful offensive of Pan-Islamism from the South of Tajikistan".⁴³ Kyrgyzstan too is worried about the spillover effect of the civil war in Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan witnessed a steep increase in its crime rate during 1991 (70 percent in the whole state and 220 in Osh oblast that borders Tajikistan), and most of this crime is linked to drugs. The illegal entry of narcotics and arms from Tajik territory into Osh, through the Afghanistan-Pamirs route, has lent a new dimension to the problem. The drug mafia operating in NWFP (Pakistan) and Afghanistan have shifted their narco-route from Karachi-Istanbul to Afghanistan-Central Asia-Europe.⁴⁴

Given the existing state of relations, it becomes obvious that Pakistan maintains deep political and strategic interests in Central Asia but its role is limited by the fact that there many regional and global powers in the region. Besides, Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and Tajikistan crises, has been viewed with serious concern both by the Central Asian states and Russia, who do not wish the repetition of such situations in their countries. On the other hand, India has maintained a policy of non-interference in Central Asia

43. *ibid*

44. *News*, 13-3-93.

and Afghanistan's affairs, focussing mainly on strengthening economic and cultural relations. India present a secular and democratic model to the Central Asian states, as against the Islamist Pakistan.

CHAPTER-III

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

With the break-up of the Soviet Union the five Central Asian republics have emerged as independent states inheriting the Soviet legacy in political, economic, cultural and educational fields. In order to keep up the continuity of the existing system a commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) was formed which seeks to guarantee safety to the old territorial boundaries, maintain peace and civil liberty in the states, help in contracting bilateral agreements for mutual benefit, and make proposals for common economic space under the old rouble economy. Having huge resources of gas, oil, coal, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, rare minerals and metals, hydro-electric power and irrigation network, besides being the main producers of cotton, wool, silk, etc, a new realisation about their immense economic potential has dawned in Central Asia. This has created high expectations among the people who are eager to reap the economic fruits of their independence from the former USSR. On the other hand, the Central Asian states are encountering serious problems due to a decline in production, high inflation and low incomes. It is becoming difficult for these states to retain the benefits of socialism, such as mass education, health care, housing, cheap public transport, subsidised foods, etc.

In many ways, the Soviet development strategy in Central Asia resulted in what Michael Hechter described as an "internal colony." Others labelled it differently; for instance, Spechler called it "welfare colonialism" and Dienes saw in Central Asia a "quasi-colonial economic structure" and viewed the region as a "plantation province".¹ The task of economic transformation in the Central Asian states has been made highly complex and difficult not only by the historical legacies but also by the sharp deterioration in the economic situation in these States since they became independent.

Most of the Central Asian republics produce fine quality cotton and plenty of wheat, fruits and oil-yielding and medicinal plants, and have developed horse, cattle and sheep-breeding farms. Virtually all of them produce Oil, gas and coal. But more fascinating is the wide range of rare metals they mine-including Bismuth, Cadmium and Thallium which are used in electronics, nuclear power, engineering and rocket-making; zinc, lead and copper of very high grade; mercury, antimony, tin and tungsten; sulphur, potassium, magnesium and iodine-and not the least, gold.

1. Jayashekar, Problems of Economic Transition, World focus, March-April 1993, p.19-20

Soviet Muslims on the whole are better educated-especially in science and technology- than Muslim communities elsewhere and they enjoy a higher standard of living than most of them.² This leads to two corollaries, one, the 55 million Muslims of the Central Asian states offer a potentially rich market; and two, they are too well educated and too developed economically to provide an easy target for exploitation by entrepreneurs. Writing in Dawn, Ghani Eirabie believes that "it has to be conceded that Pakistan has far- far less to offer than Turkey or Iran. All that we can offer is rapid access to sea."

The Soviet economic system in Central Asia followed classic imperialist logic. The Central Asian economy was an integrated part of the overall Soviet command system, primarily supplying raw materials for processing in the industrial centres of the European and Western Siberian parts of the erstwhile Soviet Union.³ An underdeveloped industrial base continues to be the key problem in Central Asia. Local agricultural produce, mainly cotton

2. Article by Ghani Eirabie, Dawn, 19/10/1991.

3. Roland Dannreuther, "Creating New States in Central Asia", Adelphi, Paper 288, p. 19.

and mineral resources, such as gold, silver, chromium, etc would have to be shipped to Russia and other republics of the CIS for processing, till such industries develop in Central Asia. Turkmenistan produces about 85 million cubic metres of gas a year, almost all of which is carried by pipeline to Russia and Ukraine. Another problem is that the indigenous labour force is low-skilled whereas two thirds of the skilled industrial workers are Slavs. The exodus of Russians and Ukrainians from Central Asia is going to affect adversely the industrial sector in the Central Asian States.⁴

Conscious of these pitfalls and in an effort to stabilise and transform their economies, the central Asian states have intensified the process of privatisation of the economy and opening to foreign investment. Underdeveloped production structures, disruption in previous economic ties and shortage of hard currency has forced these states to look for alternative sources of supply, markets and remunerative prices for their raw materials.

The Central Asian Republics are land-locked, the

4. K.Warikoo, Emerging order in Central Asia, World Focus, March-April 1993, p.9.

Caspian Sea that borders Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan is only a lake, though the biggest lake on earth. Their economies rely very heavily on agriculture and raw materials though there are fairly large sections of manufacturing industries from food processing to machine building, in practically each of the five republics.

The biggest problem of the Central Asian Republic is not, however, a relatively low per capita GNP but a highly unbalanced structure of their economies, with heavy reliance on Russia as its principal market and main support of industrial commodities and technologies.⁵ Economies of these Republics need diversification because now-a-days each of them is heavily dependent on the production of a limited number of commodities (eg. Uzbekistan on raw cotton, Kazakhstan on grain and non ferrous metals, Turkmenistan on oil and natural gas, etc.) Yet, the potential for economic development is considerable.

Pakistan, marginalized like many other states in the third world in the absence of cold war competition, is keen to forge regional alliances that promise to

5.D.Banarjee "Central Asia : Current situation and future prospects", Strategic Digest, August, 1993, P.1236

compensate for the country's economic losses and military and political deficiencies.⁶

ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANISATION (ECO) AND IT'S PROSPECTS

To promote economic cooperation, ECO (Economic Cooperation Organisation) was established as far back as 1985. But its real work started only after 1990 when the organisation was given full legal framework. As the very name of the new organization suggests, it made a bid for cooperation in the economic field, particularly trade and insurance. With a view to promote activities in these fields seven technical committees have been formed so as to give some initiative to trade and commerce. These committees primarily relate to transport, trade, commerce, education and culture.

The importance of ECO as a regional organization has considerably increased after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The inclusion of Central Asian States and Azerbaijan has increased the number of its membership to ten and it is quite likely that the scope of ECO would be redefined in the light of the new politico-economic

6. Marvin G. Weinbaum "Pakistan & Afghanistan" Westview Press, 1994.

changes in the region. So far ECO was trying to re-establish relations and it coordinated the activities of the three countries (Pakistan, Iran and Turkey) which could be said to be a part of western capitalist system. With the accession of the newly independent Central Asian states and also Azerbaijan and Afghanistan the situation is completely changed.

Pakistan is utilising ECO for establishing a direct overland link with Central Asia via Afghanistan. It was in May 1992 that the first ever summit meeting of expanded ECO was held in Ashkhabad. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan did not attend this meeting. The participating countries agreed to establish trans-Asian rail and road networks linking Islamabad, Teheran, Kabul, Istanbul, Ashkhabad, Tashkent and other Central Asian towns with terminuses at Karachi, Pasni, Gwadar, etc. Besides plans to build a pipeline originating in Turkmenistan for distribution of oil and gas to other countries via Iran and Turkey and a railway project to link Central Asia to Europe also through Iran and Turkey were discussed.

Commenting on Ashkhabad Summit, NATION writes that "the experience of ECO does not give cause for optimism. There is nothing wrong with the thinking of grand super highways spanning continents, railway trains running

through vast lands, but one will have to keep one's fingers crossed about the volcano that sits astride these dreams the volcano of Afghanistan.⁷

Pakistan hosted the next ECO Foreign Minister's conference at Islamabad in November 1992. In his inaugural address Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif listed its four common objectives

"(i) To facilitate mutual trade and economic cooperation and developing commercial and Financial Institutions; (ii) Fostering human resources and cooperation in Science, technology and communication; (iii) Establishing an infrastructure of road, rail and air links to support growing economic activity within the ECO; and (iv) Intensifying interaction among our peoples through cultural and media exchanges."⁸ Yet another meeting of the ECO was held at Quetta (Pakistan) in February 1993 which finalised ambitious plans for creating a new powerful regional block of all the ten countries (Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan). Described as the "Quetta plan of Action for ECO", the plan aims at setting up road, rail and air links and

7. NATION, 12/5/92

8. Muslim, Islamabad, November 29, 1992.

development of ports so that "trucks and trains can travel from one end of the region to the other by 2000 AD". It also envisages the creation of an ECO airline and transport corporation, gradual abolition of visas, tariffs, custom duties and restrictions on the free movement of people and goods within the region, and laying of gas and oil pipelines and power transmission lines across the region and beyond for trade in energy. ECO trade and development Bank is also on the anvil.

Many analysts have been sceptical about the efficacy of ECO. According to Arif Nizami, editor of The Nation, "Pakistan, Iran and Turkey want to have strong economic ties with the Central Asian republics and, in the process, are willing to offer the moon, but there are practical difficulties of enormous magnitude which have to be overcome even before a semblance of a meaningful basis for cooperation can be laid."⁹ Najam Sethi, editor of The Friday Times, noted that ECO compares poorly on any number of measures of economic cooperation to the European Union and ASEAN Countries. Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan did not make much headway with ECO's predecessor (Regional Co-operation for Development) at a time when

9. Arif Nizami, "Competitors promising Moon to Central Asian republics, "The Nation, Feb 9, 1993

they at least had common security concerns and alliances with the United States. They are therefore less likely to do so now. Today, "Turkey's state is avowedly 'secular' as Iran's is 'Islamic'. Turkey is solidly behind the United States, Iran is implacably opposed to it. Pakistan is lost somewhere in between. Despite the pious rhetoric, chances are they will push and shove, rather than cooperate with, one another."¹⁰

Commenting upon the Foreign Ministers level expanded ECO meeting, FRONTIER POST in its editorial stated "The truth of the matter is that the benign economic thrust is the only penetration that will be good for a region whose history is bristling with national and ethnic feuds. Afghanistan and Tajikistan are in a state of civil war and are an obstacle in the way of realising the regional design of the ECO. The trade routes will not open till peace comes there. While the region moves slowly towards the resolution of national problems, Central Asian states will be looking for alternative trade openings outside of the ECO."¹¹

10. Najam Sethi, "ECO or what ?" The Friday Times (Lahore), Feb 18-24, 1993.

11. FRONTIER POST, 29/11/92

An expanded ECO offers Pakistan several opportunities. Besides offering a vast potential for economic and trade benefits, it gives Islamabad a forum that can successfully be utilised to muster diplomatic support on key issues such as Afghanistan and Kashmir. An expanded ECO provides Pakistan a sense of security and helps it come out of the diplomatic isolation caused by the break-up of the traditional Pak-US strategic alliance. According to Pakistan's Foreign Minister, the ECO'S expansion could make it possible to strengthen multilateral ties among countries which share the Muslim faith and culture.¹² In addition to lowering trade tariffs, the ECO member countries also proposed to set up an investment bank and a common airline and establish satellite communications. However ECO has no funds, no permanent Secretariat, and no credible political or economic agenda. Only time will show how effective cooperation within the ECO will be.

BILATERAL COOPERATION

The Central Asian states are keen to link their internal rail and road network to Pakistan, Iran and -----

12. SWB, SU /1555, 4 DEC 92.

Turkey, in the same manner as it stands presently connected to Europe via Orenburg and Moscow. These states are eagerly looking for port facilities in these countries. In February 1993, Kazakhstan's Parliament approved the economic programme for 1993-95 that lays "focus on the construction of a Trans-Asian railway and highway passing through Iran, Pakistan, Russia and China, and the development of a large port system in the Caspian Sea in cooperation with Iran".¹³ Infact Kazakhstan and several other Central Asian Republics proposed to Pakistan's Minister, Sardar Asif Ali during his visit to these Republics, "The construction of a railway line linking the Republics of Central Asia to Pakistani port of Pasni through Afghanistan to enable them to export their goods to Africa, Middle East, South Africa and Australia".¹⁴ Apart from the common religious and cultural bonds, the Central Asian resentment of Soviet policies has also contributed to this reorientation so that the Central Asian states are least dependent on the Slavic states. The Central Asian societies now ascribe all ills of their economy to erstwhile Soviet policies.

Tajikistan has plentiful hydro-electric power. It is

13. K.Warikoo, no.4, p.11.

14. NEWS, 17-1-1992

separated from Pakistan only by 15-20 kilometre strip of Afghanistan known as the wakhan corridor. Tajikistan has offered to supply power to Pakistan to tide over the prevailing energy crisis. A 1600-mw hydel power project is under construction in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, some 400 kms away from Islamabad. After the completion of the project, a transmission line will be installed connecting the two capitals and it will be connected with the main power transmission line of Pakistan.¹⁵ Tajikistan has agreed to export 3,600 megawatt electricity to Pakistan from the Roganstkaya Hydel Power project on the completion of its first phase scheduled for 1997.¹⁶ An agreement to this effect was signed by Pakistani Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz and his Tajik counterpart Ismail Daulotov, during his visit to Tajikistan. They also discussed the ways and means of strengthening bilateral economic cooperation, including the purchase and transmission of electricity from Tajikistan to Pakistan. Pakistan offered the export of consumer goods and utilisation of training facilities in the field of banking and revenue collection. The possibility of developing road link with Pakistan through Wakhan corridor was also discussed.

15. PAKISTAN, 15/1/92.

16. NATION, 29/3/92

Tajikistan has agreed to start supplying Pakistan with 150 to 180 mw of electricity annually until 1997.¹⁷ On its part Pakistan agreed to give \$1500 million loan to Tajikistan against regular supply of 1000 megawatts of electricity from 1997 under an accord signed in Islamabad on August 8, 1992.¹⁸ Similarly, the President of the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mian Habib Ullah signed two different agreements with Uzbekistan¹⁹ whereby both the parties agreed to promote trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation between the entrepreneurs of both countries.

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif visited Uzbekistan in June 1992. It was during this visit that the two countries signed a treaty on the principles of interstate relations and cooperation to develop and promote political, economic, cultural, Scientific and other links. Three accords were signed which aimed at increasing bilateral cooperation in various fields. These included one on bilateral relations aimed at

17. Frontier Post, 1-7-1992.

18. Frontier Post, 9-8-1992.

19. DAWN, 29/3/92

promoting ties in the political, economic, cultural, scientific and other fields. The two countries also signed separate accords on bilateral cooperation in the fields of economies, trade, medicine and technology.²⁰

Realising the necessity of developing reliable transportation links, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have formally agreed to cooperate in the construction and restoration of highways. An agreement to this effect was signed at Islamabad by all the three parties, for which this purpose a tripartite commission is being set up.²¹

In August, 1992, President of Uzbekistan visited Pakistan and three agreements were signed between both countries. These agreements cover reciprocal promotion and protection of investment, cooperation in the sphere of water resources, power generation, irrigation and land reclamation and posts and telecommunication²². Uzbekistan has also offered agricultural technology to Pakistan.²³

20. SWB, SU/1420, 30 June, 1992

21. Business Recorder, 21-7-1992.

22. POT, p. 4146, 1992.

23. POT, p. 5382, 1992.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed in Istanbul on July 7, 1993 by the governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to promote sustained economic growth among ECO member states. The signatories agreed to the establishment of a tripartite commission to explore the possibilities of building roads, railways and air links between the three countries. The commission could also examine the possibility of laying oil and gas pipelines and electricity network between the concerned countries.²⁴ In another decision, it was decided to connect Turkmenistan and Afghanistan with the port of Karachi by Ashkabad-Kushka-Torkundi-Herat -Kandhar-Chaman-Quetta-Karachi route. This decision was taken after the conclusion of the Tripartite Commissions meeting in Islamabad on August 25, 1993. The delegations agreed to start air services between their respective capitals and other cities as soon as possible. PIA plans to start a service to Kabul and Ashkabad in the near future. The delegations also agreed in principle to cooperate in the exploration and development of oil and natural gas resources, and also to transmit electricity from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan as per the terms

24. POT, p. 2428, 1993

and conditions to be mutually agreed.²⁵

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Assef Ahmad Ali visited the Central Asian states again from January 7-15 (1994) and held detailed discussion with his Central Asian counterpart on matters of bilateral cooperation. That substantial progress was achieved in various sectors, is evidence by the conclusion of various agreements.²⁶

(a) Pakistan signed two protocols of cooperation with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. They lay down the framework for mutual consultations and consolidation of close bilateral ties and institutionalize cooperation between the Foreign Ministries of the two countries.

(b) Understanding in principle was reached with Uzbekistan on the construction of the Quetta-Kandahar-Herat road to facilitate overland links for transit trade and provision of facilities to Uzbekistan at Karachi port.

(c) Understanding in principle with Turkmenistan was also reached for laying the gas pipeline project from Khushka, a border town of Turkmenistan in south to Chaman in Pakistan. The cost of this project is estimated to be around \$ 2 billion.

25.POT,p. 2784, 1993.

26.POT, P.245, 1994

(d) Kazakhstan showed deep interest in transit trade with Pakistan. It, however, desired to examine the existing transit trade agreement signed between Pakistan-China-Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in Islamabad in 1993.

(e) Pakistan and Turkmenistan have been directly connected by air.

(f) Turkmenistan desired an expanded economic relationship with Pakistan. Besides communication, transport, transit trade and agreement on cooperation in the field of defence, it desired close bilateral cooperation in the field of agriculture as well. Pakistan's offer of \$10 million credit was accepted by the Republic of Turkmenistan. Both countries also agreed to contribute \$ 20 million for development work in each other's country.

(g) In the case of Kazakhstan, additional \$ 20 million worth of credit was announced by Pakistan. The allocation is in addition to \$10 million given earlier which the republic had utilised.

Tajikistan's President visited Pakistan in March-April of 1994. During this visit Pakistan government declared its allocation of credit of 20 million dollars to Tajikistan for purchase of Pakistani consumer goods. The two countries agreed to study the

possibility of carrying out a joint project worth 500 million dollars to build a power station in the South of Tajikistan.²⁷ Pakistan and Tajikistan entered into a 10 year agreement for reciprocal promotion and protection of investment. The two sides agreed for a favourable and fair status of investment in order to maintain a stable framework of investment and maximum effective utilization of economic resources.²⁸ The Pakistan Government has also approved the Chaman-khushka- Tajikistan rail line project which could directly link Pakistan with Central Asia.²⁹

In August 1994, President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Niyazov visited Pakistan. Niyazov and Pak Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto signed four agreements to give a concrete shape to bilateral cooperation between the two countries. These agreements were signed in the field of communications, science and technology, tourism and sports and in the field of visa and consular matters.³⁰

27.SWB, FE/1963, 5 April 1994

28.Pakistan Horizon, March 31, 1994

29.SWB, FE/2024, 17 JUNE 1994

30.SWB, FE/2078, 19 AUGUST 94.

Pakistan and the Central Asian States have maintained close diplomatic contacts at both high political and official levels, which would facilitate the evolving process of economic cooperation between the two sides. However, the possibilities for Pakistan making a commercial dent in the former Soviet Central Asian Republics are uncertain and ambitious. Pakistan has the limited ability to supply credits or hard currency to the republics which, in the short run at least, are more likely to be in need of food and other forms of assistance that hold out promise of a balanced trade. Pakistan has little acquaintance with these Islamic republics, and very few Pakistanis speak the local languages or Russian. This was particularly evident as the bureaucracy tried to gear up for a coordinated policy toward the new states. Moreover, apart from Sunni Islam and cultural affinities there is little that binds Pakistan to its potential northern partners in Central Asia.

The mere possession of natural resources by these Republics is not in itself sufficient to secure economic independence. External investment and capital has to be attracted to the region to develop these resources and to create the infrastructure required for supplying the

world markets. At the same time, the economies of the region need to be reformed so that any income derived from the sale of these resources is not wasted in propping up inefficient industries or swollen bureaucracies.

Despite frequent summits, The Central Asian countries are not taking the decisive steps needed for economic cooperation. Their trade is still overwhelmingly with Russia/CIS. India too has enhanced its credit facilities for long-standing Indian projects proposed in the Central Asian countries.

The Pakistanis seem to have already realised their limitations in expanding their area of ideological as well as economic influence in Central Asia. In the words of V.A.Jafarey, a Pakistani columnist writing in Muslim, "The romantic expectations entertained by some of us regarding the scope and nature of economic cooperation between Pakistan and the Central Asian republics seem to diverge considerably from the current harsh realities. Regrettably, this hyper-optimism is based on loose thinking, ignoring hard facts and on sentimentalism, much of it synthetic, regarding old historical and ideological links.... It is not possible to expand trade on the strength of ideology or cultural links. Our experience

with the former RCD and the ECO shows that economic factors cannot be overridden by goodwill³¹.

As Sardar Assef Ahmed Ali said in an interview; "All states seems very keen to deal with Turkey. That is where their natural affinity seems to be. They seem to be looking more to Turkey than to Iran and Pakistan." The credits offered by Pakistan to the Central Asian states have largely been 'symbolic' in nature. Developing an effective infrastructure for communication would require huge sums of investments which Pakistan can hardly afford. The Central Asian states themselves are badly in need of foreign exchange and would be unable to significantly contribute in this regard³². The economic feasibility of many of the joint ventures signed between Pakistan and Central Asia has been seriously questioned by economists. For example, it has been pointed out that the cost of transmission line from Tajikistan to Pakistan would be so high that the supply of electricity would be far more expensive than producing it at home. In fact, the economic rationale of many of such Joint ventures has not seriously been thought. The practical implementation

31.V.A.Jafarey in Muslim, 13 December 1992.

32.Tahir Amin, "Pakistan and Central Asian states"
Strategic Studies, Vol.16, No4, 1994

of the agreements would probably bring the planners to more realistic conclusions.

CHAPTER - IV

RELIGIOUS/CULTURAL TIES

Central Asia today is little known and understood in Pakistan because for nearly seventy years that extensive region, wherefrom came the medieval Islamic rulers and which bestowed a Islamic cultural character to the people inhabiting the present day Pakistan, was a closed to Pakistan. However this vast stretch of Asian heartland from the steppes of Kazakhstan to the Arabian sea and from the Caspian to the mouth of the Indus, from one one cultural zone where people have common religious bonds.

For many centuries it is this Central Asian landmass through passed the great Silk Road, facilitating the movement of traders and businessman, scholars and missionaries, artists and artisans invaders and conquerors between east and west. Under the Kushans, the north and north west India and territories of Central Asia were integrated into a single kingdom. It is during this period that a particular type of dress, shalwar, kamiz, sherwani and turban were introduced which are still in vogue in Pakistan. It is the Samanid rulers of Bukhara, who sent down their Amirs to Ghazni, one of whom, Sultan Mahmud of Gazni integrated the present Pakistan into his empire and thus paved the way

1. A.H. Dani, New light on Central Asia, Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1993, p.31.

for propagation of Persian language and culture there.

During the Mughals, the cultural exchange was largely promoted because of Persian being the common language link for both the regions. Persian acted as the vehicle for transmission of Central Asian and Iranian culture to the people of the Indian sub continent, Where Persian was the main language of the elite. It is during the Mughal period that the Timurid architecture influenced the building of forts, palaces, mausolea and madrassahs. The cities of Lahore, Peshawar, Multan and Thatta not only became great seats of learning but also developed many arts and crafts that can find their parallels in Central Asia. In particular the copper vessels, silver plates and vases, the use of china ware, zinc coated copper ware became popular in this region.²

Historically speaking, Pakistan never existed in the minds of the Central Asians. Even after Pakistan's formation the country did not maintain any contacts with the Central Asian republics in any form. Pakistan only reminded the Central Asians of a hostile power that fomented trouble in Afghanistan. Pakisan's policy

².ibid, p.74.

towards Central Asia is also determined by its complex identity crisis vis-a-vis India. In this respect Pakistan perceives that the Islamisation of Central Asian Republic would strengthen and rationalise Pakistan's own existence as a nation state.³ The most highly cherished objective of Pakistan's domestic and foreign policy since its inception has been to establish an Islamic order and to bring about unity among Muslim states to draw them closer towards Pan-Islamic grouping of nations and to establish closer relationship with them which has roots in pre-independence period. The Muslim League supported the various independent movements in the fellow Muslim countries. The aim of this policy was to establish and strengthen fraternal ties with the Islamic world and to develop closer cooperation among them to safeguard their common interests. M.A.Jinnah in his message to the Ummah said that the "Muslims of the world are attached to each other by their common faith, religion and culture."⁴

The main plank of Jinnah's policy was to maintain close links with the Muslim countries of the world, a policy which he adopted in pre-independence period. He -----

3. D.Banarjee "Central Asia ; Current situation and future prospects", Strategic Digest, August 1993, P.1250.

4. Surendra Chopra, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan's Foreign Policy", India Quarterly, Jan-June 93, P.9.

took definite steps to promote Muslim unity and proclaimed Pakistan's identification with the cause of Islam in any part of the world. The main purpose of this effort to seek friends in the Muslim world was to seek their support, against India as it has been involved in a long standing conflict over Kashmir with the latter⁵.

The first Summit meet of Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) in 1969 at Rabat (Morocco), made Pakistan dream come true. The first summit declared the resolve of Muslim States to "consult, together with a view to promoting between themselves close cooperation and mutual assistance in the economic, scientific, cultural and spiritual fields". Later on Zia- ul-Haque, the former President of Pakistan declared that Pakistan would collapse without Islam. He tried to seek an ideological fig leaf to cover the naked realities of power and a convenience to overcome the crisis of legitimacy. Zia saw Islam as the only remedy for the nation's ills and raison detre of the State as well as the unity and strength of the nation. Zia used Islamic fundamentalism cleverly in order to strengthen Pakistan's relations with the Muslim countries (particularly conservative states) in order to strengthen his position domestically. The

⁵.ibid, p.11

Afghan crisis and the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan provided golden opportunity to Zia to strengthen his position and carry out his Islamist designs.

When the former chief of the ISI, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul publicly propounded the thesis that the Islamic Jihad must cross the Oxus, it was generally interpreted as a signal of Islamabad's desire to ensure that the Mujahedin score a military victory over the Soviet backed Najib government. But as relations between Moscow and the Central Asian states deteriorated, the Hamid Gul thesis began assuming new and opportunistic dimensions. There were two broad opinions as to how best to use the Central Asian opening. The quintessential American backers wanted to entice Washington into the area with Pakistan acting as the strategic pivot and in the process enhance Pakistan's strategic value which would allow it to get back into American favour. The other view, predominant in the armed forces, was to look at the crumbling of the Soviet empire an opening up of a window of opportunity for Pakistan to spread its sphere of influence into Central Asia where over 55 million Muslims live.

This line of thinking was underscored by the assumption that only Pakistan has both moral (because it

was the only State formed for Muslims alone) and military (it has the largest army in the Muslim World) capabilities to realise the concept of the Muslim Ummah that stretches from Kashmir to Turkey. Militant Islam, to this section of the enconsced elite of Islamabad, is the only answer to the unipolar world dominated by the US. But the ideological underpinnings of this hard line view betrayed a warped and delirious understanding of the Central Asian situation, which Pakistan saw unfolding in the coming years. Zia's sudden disappearance from the political scene brought Benazir Bhutto a liberal, supported by the workers, peasants and liberal intellectuals and leftists to power and the process of restoring the medieval Islam suffered a jolt but temporarily⁶. The new elections saw the entire fundamentalist element flocking around Nawaz Sharif enabling him to keep Bhutto out of power. To sum up, it may be pointed out that Islamic factor in Pakistan's internal and external policy has played a dominant role in the country's affairs.

The former US ambassador Mr. Robert Oakley, in a report, "Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia ; Perspectives for Political Evolution and the Role of -----"

⁶.ibid, Page-27.

Islam", has anticipated three kinds of crisis in the region- economic, ethnic and Islamic. Economically, strong popular protests are expected due to the continuous fall in living standards; ethnically, a clear potential of disruption, particularly between the "natives" and Russian populations is expected and the third crisis is an Islamic sweep in the event of popular unrest and governmental inaction. Oakley anticipates Pakistan, Iran and Turkey to be the major players in this region.⁷

There has been a revival of Islamic awareness in the Central Asian states after long standing restrictions were removed.⁸ The number of mosques and madrassahs built in the recent years may be many times more than has been seen in the same period in other Muslim countries. Soviet Sources claimed that by early 1991, the number of mosques in the region had gone up in two years from 402 to 2,500. The number of people who performed the Haj in 1991 showed a sharp increase, notwithstanding the enormous cost of such an undertaking in the present difficult economic condition. Fifty

⁷. Batuk Vora, Battling Phantoms in Central Asia, Times of India, 15 April 1993.

⁸. Maqbool A. Bhatti, Pakistan's perspectives on Central Asia, Strategic Studies, 1994, p.28

million copies of the Holy Koran were reported to have been printed in the region in 1989 alone apart from the substantial gifts received from Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The urban areas have been overwhelmed by the religious fervour that can be matched only by an aversion to the Communist atheism. Today the urban population in Central Asia is undergoing a revival of Islamic spirit in their daily life, practices and even thinking and vision as seen in recent art expressions. This tendency of Islamisation appears to grow and influence the life style of Central Asians in the years to come. The evidence for such a change can be given from the fact that in Central Asia the adab of dastarkhwan has continued to play dominant role in the social life of the Muslims. All Islamic rituals have assumed a new meaning in the eyes of the people. The Central Asian family structure has not been affected at all by the West European influences. The Central Asian man will continue to remain Central Asian in future and their life will be influenced more and more by Islamic moral code⁹.

The upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism predates the Iranian and Saur revolutions. Benningsen has referred to

9. A.H.Dani, no.2, pp.134-135.

three phenomena which had roots in domestic politics :

(i) The conjunction of Islamic beliefs and practices and heightened nationalism (ii) The activities of the underground Islamic organisation in the former Soviet Union and (iii) The growing interest in Islam evinced by the Muslim Intellectuals of the country.¹⁰ Benningsen emphasised the connection between the Iranian revolution and the Saur Revolution in Afghanistan and the spurt in Islamic activity in Soviet Union.¹¹ There has been increase in the activities of the unregistered mullahs who were paid through voluntary Contributions by the Conservative Muslims. These priests ran clandestine religious schools and illegal mosques. Yaacov Ro'i attributes this upsurge to the limitations placed by the former Soviet authorities on the practice of orthodox Islam. The dearth of mosques and the psychological tendencies that reject secularisation led to the flourishing of non-establishment, non-orthodox Islam.¹² The Sufi order has been imparting religious education to the youth. Apart from the Sufi order, Sunni

10. Alexandra Benningsen, "Mullahs, Mujahidin and Soviet Muslims," problems of Communism, vol.33, November-December 1984, P.31.

11. ~~ibid~~, p.28-44.

12. Yaacov Ro'i "Islam and Nationalism in Soviet Central Asia", problems of communism, vol 39, July-August 1990, p.52

fundamentalist Wahabis who toe the Saudi Arabian fundaeentalist line, have also to be active.

Adherence to the traditional Muslim ceremonies like circumcision and celebration of most important religious festivals and religious festivals and regular visits to mausoleums of saints and historical figures, like Shah-e-Zindeh complex in Samarkand, Ahmed Yasavi's tomb in Turkestan and the tomb of Bahauddin Naqshband founder of the Naqashbandi Sufi brotherhood has not only common but these practices have served on a big scale. The new found interest in Islamic fundamentalism has become respectable particularly in the rural areas and the youth are evincing a lot of interest in these developments. Yaacov Ro'i attributes two reasons to this interest in Islamic revivalism, first the impact of developments in Iran and second the "crudity and arbitrariness of Soviet anti religious propoganda".

The Afghan Mujahideen particularly the Jamiat-i-Islami and Hezb-i-Islami groups developed close contacts with the underground organisation of Central Asian Muslims. The distributed religious literature including cassettes and works of Arab and Pakistani fundamentalists ideologues, Muhammad Kutab and Maulana Maududi. This provided an important evidence of Pakis-

tani influence on the Muslims of the region.¹³ Few years ago, then Deputy Chairman of Tajik Republic's KGB, A. Belousov was quoted by Tass on 1 August 1991 as accusing the Pakistani Intelligence Services of carrying out a subversive programme code-named 'M' to destabilise the socio-political situation in Soviet Central Asia and to create conditions for its secession.¹⁴ Belousov claimed that 150 groups of Afghan Mujahideen are operating near the Tajik border to establish channels of communication with the pan-Islamic activists in Tajikistan.¹⁵ Training centres are also reported to have been set up in Afghan settlements near the border to give religious and military instructions to young Tajik, Uzbeks and Turk-mens.¹⁶

Years of Soviet-sponsored atheism have failed to lessen popular devotion to Islam or expunge the belief that Islam extended beyond private to public life. In Tajikistan the consolidation of a radical Islamist opposition during the internal contest for power in 1992

13. Surendra Chopra in Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics, ed. K. Warikoo, Central Asia : Emerging New order, Har Anand Publications, 1995, p-303.

14. SWB, SU/1121, 11 July 1991.

15. ibid.

16. ibid

revealed that the Islamist groups had superseded the nationalist political groupings in the new political power. In Uzbekistan, a similar process has taken place : the Islamist groups have emerged as a potential threat to Karimov.

The swift ascendance of political Islam in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is not surprising giving its power for political mobilisation. For any political opposition, an Islamic-centred political stance has the advantage of striking the ex-Communist leaderships of Central Asia at their most sensitive point.¹⁷ As a political ideology, radical Islam also has the attraction of combining radical political objectives within an outwardly traditional framework. For people used to the all-encompassing and intrusive ideology of Marxism-Leninism, it can be reassuring to find a more authentic replacement which provides a similarly comprehensive interpretation of the world with the backing of a global internationalist brotherhood. Just as committed nationalists have overnight become Islamists in Algeria or Egypt so in Central Asia the transition from Communist to Islamist is inherently no more difficult

¹⁷.Roland Dannreuther, "Creating New States in Central Asia", Adelphi paper no. 288, March 1994, p.18.

than the transition from Communist to nationalist. The revival of the Islam is due to operationalization of the right to freedom of belief and right to practice religion.

Islamabad's Central Asian forays started well before the Soviet Union gave evidence of its own disintegration. In an effort to gain their political support, Zia pandered to the vanity of the right-wing fundamentalist parties with regard to the creation of a Pan-Islamic state encompassing the entire Muslim world. These parties had become visible in the armed forces. The Pakistan hawks, otherwise known as "Islamic visionaries", that ruled the country sought to perpetuate the belief that Pan-Islamic unity could be fostered only after the process of Islamisation in Pakistan was complete.¹⁸ They attempted to marry the concept of Pan-Islamic unity with Islamabad in search for the much needed "strategic depth" that was essential for its adversarial posturing vis-a-vis India.

In the most recent twist to the Central Asian drama being staged at Pakistan's doorstep, the Jamat Islami is

¹⁸. Aabha Dixit, "Position of Pakistan and Afghanistan", World Focus, March- April 1993, p.41.

allegedly providing arms, money, training and cadres to Tajik Islamist militants stationed in Afghanistan. Retired ISI officers from Pakistan are reportedly involved in the clandestine operation, a factor which may cause severe strains in Pakistan's relations with Central Asian states and Russia.

In Pakistan, There was an overplay of the Islamic-religious dimension, that is, being Muslim with historical linkages, these states are bound to come close to Pakistan. Many in Pakistan viewed their emphasis on Islamic cultural heritage as the sole basis of nationhood while others began to overemphasise Central Asian content in Pakistani cultural and historical heritage.¹⁹

The activities of Islamic militants in some of these states were over-projected as if these states would soon turn into Islamic-puritanical states. The religious and right-wing groups with linkage with the then Pakistani government were active in projecting this perspective which alarmed the governments in Central Asia. None of them wanted to create Islamic socio-political and economic order these groups advocated for Pakistan. The governments of these states were thus cautious in

¹⁹. POT, p.169, 1994

cultivating wide ranging ties with Pakistan in order to contain the impact of Pakistani Islamic hardliners on their societies.²⁰

It is necessary to realise that "the religious resurgence in Central Asia is of 'cultural Islam', not of 'ideological' Islam".²¹ Whatever it is scholars realise the inevitability of the assertion of traditional values that were suppressed during the period of communist dictatorship. The noted Russian writer, George I. Mirsky has observed that, "for Central Asians, Islam now embodies the ideas of nationalism, and sovereignty, it is a banner of liberation".²²

Realising the importance of developing cultural ties with the newly independent Central Asian states, Pakistan has signed several agreements for promoting cultural exchange with these states. These involve scientific and technical exchanges, training programmes for personnel in banking, customs, income tax, and other services as well as scholarships for Central Asian

²⁰. POT, p.169, 1994

²¹. Maqbool A. Bhatti, " Paksitana's Perspectives on Central Asia", Strategic Studies, 1994, p.35.

²². George I. Mirsky, "Central Asia's emergence", Current History, october 1992.

students at the Pakistani universities. Memoranda of Understanding with several Central Asian states have been signed for the exchange of students, professors and text books in the universities.

As Pakistani columnist, Anjuman Brahim writes "Being a Muslim state does not automatically mean that cohesion, trust and mutual economic benefit is a priority for these states"²³. These realisations on the Pakistanis had come primarily because the five Central Asian states strongly opted for secular and modern states rather than the Pakistani model of "Islamic state". As Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, himself stated, "I do not think fundamentalist Islam has much chance.... It is not possible to build a civilised relationship between sovereign states which see themselves as democratic on religious grounds."

More shocking for Pakistan has been the fact that despite all the Islamic pulls, these states continue to be ruled by the ex-communist leaders. In fact, in some cases such as in Kazakhstan, an authoritarian presidential regime is fully accepted and legitimised by the people. In Tajikistan, ex-communist leaders have

²³.Anjuman Ibrahim in Nation, 25 April, 1992.

come back to power. Some Pakistanis are still optimistic about the resurgence of Islam in the Central Asian states, as stated in the Islamabad based Institute of Regional Studies study report on Central Asia. It says "It appears certain that it will take some time for Central Asian Muslims to unlearn their Marxist heritage and to discover their roots and tradition."²⁴ While others doubt whether "the self-righteous posture of Pakistan" will continue to work. As an editorial in the Pakistani daily, Muslim commented, "The management of the Nawaz Sharif government's foreign and financial policies seems to be in the hands of people of singularly myopic sight". It further writes, "The latest marvel of making a hash of simple things to the hamhanded and seatter-brained approach to the Central Asian republics.... the only concern seems to be to "Islamise" those newly independent Muslim republics... can Pakistan in right mind hope to play its role in the ECO without sorting out the Afghan mess it has created to serve the US policies which Afghanistan has given up to pursue entirely different objectives?...The self-righteous posture of Pakistan has already made the peoples in those republics wary of our credentials. If we do not

24.P.Stobdan, "looking towards Central Asia", Strategic Analysis, November 1993, p.1115.

correct our conduct, we may end up in a very bad way.
May be, blackballed by the majority of the ECO club."²⁵

The spectre of fundamentalist Islam over Central Asia is undeniably present, helped by the ideological vacuum arising out of the demise of communism, but it has been exaggerated.²⁶ On the contrary D. Banarjee perceives that the greatest danger to the region is posed by Islamism which acts as a rallying point of all the destructive forces and in fact acts as their leader.²⁷

Notwithstanding their intra-ethnic diversities, the Muslims of Central Asia have been sharing common religious beliefs and cultural traditions with their counterparts in Pakistan. The army-burecracy-ISI combine in Pakistan has been persuing late General Zia's strategy to export Jihad across the Oxus into Central Asia. There has been a whole debate over the role of Pakistan in Central Asia, whether the new policy should be similar to its policy towards Afghanistan, a consensus or cohesive national views of Islamic fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami

25 .POT, 24 Feb, 1992

26 .Anthony Hyman, " Power and Politics in Central Asia's New Republic", RISCT, Conflict studies-273, p.5.

27 .D.Banarjee, no. 3., p.1245.

political parties, ISI and the military that has been practiced during the Zia regime. In the words of Ahmed Rasheed, correspondent for the Independent (London) and Far Eastern Economic Review (Hongkong): "I think this debate has already been opened and we have already seen many of our religious political leaders such as Qazi Hussain Ahmed and those of Jamiat Ulema Islam and Jamiat Ulema Pakistan, all of whom have very strong opinion on Central Asia, and think that we should somehow become the leaders of an Islamic movement which spreads through Central Asia. And, I think, the argument is being followed by other people and by other elements of entire government."

In the field of religious to crusade, a number of missionaries, especially of the society called Tablighi Jama'at have reached out to every nook and corner of Central Asia, to proselytise other people.²⁸

The range of options open to the Central Asian secular nationalist leaderships for dealing with the Islamist challenge similarly does not radically differ from that of their Middle Eastern counterparts. They can opt for repression as in Algeria or Egypt ; they can seek

28.D.Banarjee, no. 27, p.1251.

to incorporate these Islamist groups in a democratic process as in Jordan or Yemen ; or they can attempt to institute a conservative Islamic order as in Saudi Arabia. Repression is undoubtedly the preferred option at present, but the other options could become potentially attractive, at least in some of the States.

One cannot ignore the ground reality that nationalism and Islam have gained substantial strength to the extent that it is not easy to undo this process. It is likely that Pakistan's cultural offensive supported by the religious crusades of Jamat-i-Islami, Tableegi Jamat

activists in the Central Asian states will mould the minds of the younger generations, who are now exposed to the resurgence of cultural Islam and get training at madrassah. However, this process may impede the process of closure political understanding between the Central Asian leadership and Pakistan.

CHAPTER-V

CONCLUSION

The emergence of independent Central Asian States, with its predominantly Muslim population, has attracted global attention and interest. Due to its proximity to South and West Asia, the region has assumed geopolitical importance. The key questions that face the Central Asian Republics range from the issues of identity, domestic leadership, democracy, ties with other Muslim neighbours, interrelationships within the CIS, the outlook for their economies, the nature of Islam in politics, and the character of their future foreign policies.

The Central Asian States need to find an immediate solution to the economic vacuum caused by disruption of previous economic systems, particularly almost the total absence of foreign currency reserves. The second immediate need is to meet the demands of commodities and food supplies. The third is to carry forward many industrial and commercial projects that were in hand but remain to be completed. Then come the long term plans for making these States stand on their own economic footing by utilising their rich natural resources and agricultural products. But above all the most important is the creation of the machinery, the training of the manpower and the dissemination of the professional knowledge for transforming their economy to private and market economy. It

is in this field of transmission of technical experience that ECO can help in for restructuring the economic system of the new states.

The Central Asian States look forward to ECO for opening to outside world so that their natural resources and agricultural products could find a remunerative market outside. This can be provided within the framework of ECO if the transport facilities could be developed further and tariff arrangement is eased for the movement of goods. Besides, there is the need for bringing these States within a given economic system which facilitates and promotes their mutual trade and commerce. This is very important because such a step has not been taken by the ECO so far.

One of the ways in which the Central Asian countries can meet the situation created by the inadequate flow of foreign capital and also make their economies viable is through the expansion of foreign trade. These countries have rich natural resources which can be exploited for increasing their trade. But expansion of trade requires access to ports, and linking production bases to accessible ports through efficient means of transport, i.e., railways. This has made the Central Asian countries, which are landlocked, look for port facilities

in Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, in addition to available facilities through Russia. Of these, access through Pakistan would be costly and the least advantageous. This is because the link between Central Asia and Karachi will have to be established by constructing a highway through difficult terrain in Afghanistan. Roadways are the least efficient to transport bulky products, such as oil, gas and other raw materials. Besides, the continuing turmoil in Afghanistan and on the Tajik-Afghan border pose the greatest challenge to Pakistani initiatives to create a direct land bridge with Central Asia. Notwithstanding the overplay of Islamic factor by Pakistani government and media, the key issue for a sustained and realistic Pakistani presence in the region demands a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. This will be possible only if Islamabad is willing to demonstrate a greater willingness to pursue peace rather than war in Afghanistan.

Economic and political instability in the Central Asian region alongwith increasing interference in the local affairs by some of the Muslim states, prominently Pakistan have transformed Central Asia into a source of regional instability which could even develop into a source of global instability. Chances of the latter may increase if the issue of nuclear weapons on the territory

of Central Asia (in Kazakhstan) remain unresolved, or if the present politicised Islamic movement as we find in Tajikistan, assumes proportions of a militant Islamic fundamentalism, or if the already existing drug trafficking from this area is not effectively stopped.

Islamic factor has played a dominant role in Pakistan's domestic and foreign policy. Pakistan has utilised Islam as instrument of its foreign policy and to enhance its relationship with Muslim Countries. In this context, Pakistan has tried to project India as a security threat to Pakistan and Islamic Ummah. Even after the end of cold war, Pakistan continues with this policy. It has tried to get the cooperation of Central Asian states in ECO and OIC against India. But these States have steered clear of the Pak machinations and maintain cordial relationship with India.

Furthermore, the Central Asian states are not going to be junior partners in their relationship with Pakistan, since they have a 90 percent literacy rate, a highly developed infrastructure and a per capita income of \$2500 (seven times that of Pakistan). The fact that these States are favourably disposed towards the Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) in terms of military and political alliances with Russia, does put other countries

in secondary position. The Central Asian Republics being members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and basically favour strengthening of political, economic, cultural and strategic ties within the Commonwealth. Of late there has emerged an increased economic and political cooperation among themselves. As such, Pakistan is only but one of the neighbouring countries which can sustain its relation with the Central Asian States on the basis of equality and mutuality of interest and benefits.

Russia, China and India which have high stakes in maintaining regional peace and security, will seek to prevent the Central Asian States from entering into any Islamic blocks as envisaged by Pakistan. Similarly, the Central Asian States, which have considerable proportion of non-Muslim / Slavic population, more particularly in Kazakhstan, have time and again declared their resolve to maintain the secular character of their countries in order to ensure inter-ethnic accord and peace. In fact there is a realisation about these issues in Pakistan now. In its editorial the News advised the Pak government that "in striving to forge ties with the Central Asian Republics, Islamabad should refrain from

attracting these states by the Islamic appeals." ¹ It stated "while the government should do its utmost to forge closer ties with the Central Asian Republics, it should guard against the temptation of treating them as means to reconstruct the many time shattered myth of Muslim Ummah." ² This view has been shared by influential academic and diplomatic circles in Pakistan. At a recent conference organized by Foundation for research in National Development and Security (FRIENDS), Talat Wizarat argued that in the foreseeable future neither the Central Asian Republics nor the Muslim neighbours shall be in a position to forge meaningful relations. ³ Agha Shahi, a seasoned diplomat and former Foreign Minister of Pakistan stated that the "six Muslim Republics are formally independent, in reality they remain dependent on the Russian Federation". ⁴

Pakistan's adventures in Central Asia have resulted in very little so far. Big schemes have been talked about, promises have been made, credits have been offered. But not one project has materialised. Its com

1. NEWS, 27/2/92
2. NEWS, 26/2/92
3. POT, p. 6268, 1992.
4. ibid.

mercial relations have remained confined to small scale tourism and petty smuggling. As admitted by a Pakistani columnist its primary export items so far have been alcohol and sex starved revellers and politico-religious propagandists. ⁵

Similarly Mohammad Aslam writing in NEWS has questioned the claims of Pakistan ruling elite on achieving the socio-economic and religious harmony among the various linguistic-ethnic-sectarian groups of Pakistan from Karachi to Gilgit and Quetta to Jhang? ⁶ Admitting that Pakistan has not been able to achieve a semblance of socio-cultural and politico-religious harmony to eliminate economic disparities from within its own country, Aslam questions the Pakistani claim to provide viable scheme of things to overcome similar ailments to neighbouring countries.

Pakistan's active role in the region is limited by the absence of any common border with any of the Central Asian States. Islam can undoubtedly be a unifying force but only if it is not used as an ideological and political weapon on fellow Muslims. When it is

5. Eqbal Ahmed in Dawn, 6-12-1992.

6. NEWS, 28/10/92

explicitly politicised, religion divides as it has divided Afghanistan, and has resulted in bloodshed in Tajikistan.

These Central Asian States have considerable economy prosperity (although they are facing economic hardships), near universal literacy and a very high position in many social indicators which is quite in contrast to the situation in Pakistan. It is doubtful as to whether Pakistan can positively contribute to alleviate the enormous socio-economic difficulties in Central Asia during their process of transition. These are the factors which restrict the scope of opportunities for increasing strategic, political, economic and cultural interaction between Pakistan and Central Asia.

(a) The principal needs of Central Asia being for capital and technology, Pakistan, as a developing country at the lower end of the economic scale, can make only a modest contribution in this regard.

(b) The present leadership of the Central Asian region lays great stress on its secular outlooks and Russia's pre-eminent role which makes them watchful for any fundamentalists inroads arising out of close association with the countries of Islamist dispensation like Pakistan. The Central Asian States have so far shown low-key interest in Pakistan's Islamist and block-based

politics. Their primary anxieties with regard to Pakistan have been the export of fundamentalism beyond Afghanistan's border into the C.I.S.

(c) Pakistan would have to wait for the situation in Afghanistan to stabilise for any meaningful cooperation with the Central Asian States. In the meantime, Pakistan has certain deficiencies in its infrastructure, particularly in its communications and transport facilities, which are already under pressure and can hardly be expected to meet the additional demands of Central Asia. Pakistan also lacks expertise in Russian and Turkish languages, and needs to build up a reservoir of man power that is capable of taking advantage of the opportunities in the region.

d) Pakistan, while dealing with the Central Asian states has but to face stiff competition from other neighbouring countries like India, Iran and Turkey.

If there is accentuation of economic and political problem in Central Asia, then Pakistan can hope to stoke the Islamist fires there. Given the ground realities, the policies of Central Asian States have become more Euro centric and South Asia is not on their high priority. Besides, It is not practicable to expand trade on the basis of ideology or cultural links. Pakistan can hope to upgrade its relations with Central

Asian States on the basis of mutual benefit and equality and not by playing up the Islamic sentiments.

Diplomacy succeeds when it is based on reality, not as what other side imagines the world to be. Nebulous notions of Pan - Islamism strike little or no chord with the new states of Central Asia. These states of Central Asia are certainly looking for new and more friends. But as Nazarbayev's visit to India before he came to Pakistan shows their preference is for those who have more concrete things to offer than fanciful notions of supranational identity. It is important to recognise that relations between Pakistan and the States of Central Asia can expand only by making a realistic assessment of what these states actually need and what Pakistan can really supply. The future geopolitical orientation of Central Asia is going to be determined by the extent of success achieved by Pakistan and Iran in reorienting the Central Asian economy, society and polity by linking it to the Pan- Islamic stream on the one hand and the response from the democratic and secular countries, particularly the Western countries, Russia and India.

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